MICRA™

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#49

FROM THAILAND TO SOUTH AFRICA TO MICRA WITH ARTIST –
TED BOONTHANAKIT

OF WAYOUT WEDDINGS & MICRA . . .
LAMAR WALDRON
SUSAN BARROWS

FROM THEATRE TO MIGHTY MARVEL
BOB HALL
DRAMA IS HIS GAME, COMICS IS HIS FAME

DAVID ANTHONY KRAFT'S

COMICS INTERVIEW

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cover contributed by:
TED BOONTHANAKIT

UP FRONT

I must say, when the proposal for MICRA was first put before me, I didn't think the project had much of a chance for success. After all, you can count on the finger of one hand the sole female to star in a long-running comic-book series — and even WONDER WOMAN foundered along on corporate good will and welfare until **George Perez** revitalized the title. And name one *real* science-fiction comic to find success in recent memory!

So MICRA had two strikes against her, right from the start. Why, then, did I agree to publish the series? Others asked me that question with something of an edge that suggested I had, at last, gone bonkers. To tell the truth, I even wondered that about myself at times.

But it wasn't the project I was buying — it was the people. While the proposal was rough, unpolished, **Lamar Waldron** was both a founder and director of the Atlanta Fantasy Fair, which meant to me that he had a lot on the ball. What he didn't know about writing comics I was confident he could and would learn along the way. And when I saw the wonderful paintings of **Ted Boonthanakit**, I knew anyone that talented couldn't help but learn to master line artwork, even though he'd never really pencilled and inked before. In fact, MICRA #1 is the very first comics story *ever* drawn by Ted, a fact even many comics professionals find hard to believe!

That MICRA is a success, both critically and commercially, lodged firmly among the top 10 bestselling black-and-white comics, is thus a matter of great satisfaction. Thanks to editor **Dwight Jon Zimmerman**, I can sit back at a remove and read each new issue fresh when it comes in, just as if it were from any other publisher. And what makes it all worthwhile is that, as a comics reader, I enjoy each new issue of MICRA and number it among my favorites.

What more can a publisher ask?

-Dwight

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"It was the most elaborately scripted and

intricately choreographed wedding in history."

LAMAR WALDRON & SUSAN BARROWS

I've done lots of interviews with comics professionals over the years, and Dave Kraft has certainly run many more by far here in COMICS INTERVIEW. But until this interview with Lamar Waldron and Susan Barrows, neither of us had ever been involved with a post-nuptual *interview, conducted between the interviewees' wedding and their departure on their honeymoon!*

Lamar and Susan are, respectively, the writer and letterer/associate editor of MICRA, the fine science-fiction comics maxi-series published by the ubiquitous Mr. Kraft himself. But reading about Micra's strange and dangerous futuristic world could not prepare one for the unusual nature of this particular wedding ceremony. That it was held at Atlanta's Dixie Trek convention over Memorial Day weekend was no surprise; conventions are part of the bride and groom's lives, since both Susan and Lamar were long associated with the Atlanta Fantasy Fair, one of the country's leading comics and s.f. cons. But imagine, if you will, a wedding that opened with a recorded suite from THE BRIDE OF FRANKENSTEIN and closed with the theme song to THE FLINTSTONES. A wedding presided over by both a minister and a High Priestess of Fire. A wedding featuring a recorded message from the celebrated Forrest J. Ackerman on the subject of gerbils. A wedding in which, instead of the bride being given away, the groom was challenged to fight a creature called Mongo for the right to her hand (not to mention the rest of her). You know, this was probably exactly what a wedding between two people in the Funnybook Business should be like!

The scene shifts to the following day. Tape recorder in hand, I find myself in the Waldron-Barrows home, marveling at its decor, which primarily follows two basic motifs; dinosaurs and flamingos. What, I wonder, can I expect from this interview I am about to conduct with Lamar Waldon, the Man Who Guides Micra's Life, and Susan Barrows, Renowned Wit and Absolute Knockout (as you'll see from the photo Dave runs of her)?

Well, read on and you'll find out. Take a seat and make sure not to trip over the flamingos.

PETER SANDERSON: *What did you two think about the ceremony yesterday?*

SUSAN BARROWS: Well, the numbness hasn't worn off, but I have felt radiant and babbling all day, as hoarse as I am. *(Laughter.)*

LAMAR WALDRON: It was the most elaborately scripted wedding in history, the most intricately choreographed —

SUSAN: I wrote some of it at the very last minute. Now we'll see if something slapped together out of spit & scotch tape can last a lifetime.

LAMAR: It also showed that one of Susan's many talents is acting.

SUSAN: Oh, give me a break! Yeah, I *feign* interest when he's telling me about the prime interest rate and how a mortgage can work for me.

LAMAR: She was the Mae West of Atlanta yesterday.

SUSAN: The only thing that pays off bet-

© 1987 Waldron and Boonthanakit

"Dave Kraft called and said Maggie and Don

The much-sought-after priceless Waldron/Williamson collaboration. "The cover to VISIONS #3, which I inked over a print of a page Al Williamson had pencilled back in the 1950s. When he liked it enough to sign it. I was in heaven!"
Williamson ©1981
Waldron

Thompson had got a real bang out of it."

I'LL SNARE HIS ATTENTION. BUT THEN IT'S ALL UP TO YOU, SUSAN.
GOOD LUCK!
THANKS, GIRLFRIEND!
An open letter to LAMAR WALDRON:
Hey, Lamar! I know MICRA has us on a tight schedule, but do you think you might find the time between issues #4 and #5 to marry me?
Love,
Susan Barrows

"I tried retouching Ted's MICRA...it looked *horrendous!* So I drew it from scratch."

ter than having no taste is having no shame. Everyone involved came thrugh with flying colors.

PETER: *And what's all this about your proposing to Lamar in the pages of the BUYER'S GUIDE?*

SUSAN: Oh, that was fun. *(Laughter.)* I called **Dave Kraft** and told him about my mad idea and did he think **Don and Maggie Thompson** of the BUYER'S GUIDE would mind being coconspirators? He thought it was great. So, while Lamar was off to the Diamond Trade Show I drew out the proposal. It was hell getting it done. And then he came back —

LAMAR: I was going to say, and then you got to draw MICRA in the ad yourself.

SUSAN: Oh, that was excruciating. I can't draw. I maintain I'm no artist. I maintain I'm not a professional letterer, but I'm handy.

LAMAR: She can draw almost as good as she can letter.

SUSAN: As *well. (Laughter.)* Almost as *well* as I can edit.

LAMAR: Which means she's talented in all of those ways, too, even though she's too modest.

SUSAN: Yeah, yeah, right. I tried doing kind of a cheesy thing. I wanted MICRA to wink, and I tried to do it by Retouching a Xerox of one of Ted's MICRAs from issue #1. And it looked *horrendous!* I couldn't get anything right. So I drew it from scratch and sent it off. Then I waited. I was on tenterhooks for over a week because it wasn't confirmed that they would take it. I thought maybe it was against their editorial policy, maybe it's gauche — but **Dave Kraft** gave me a call later and said **Maggie & Don Thompson** had got a real bang out of it.

Our subscription didn't get here on Saturday the way it usually does, and by Saturday night friends were calling. I was

VITAL STATISTICS

Name: Lamar Waldron
Born: 15 August 1954, Atlanta, GA
Occupation: Free-lance writer
Credits: Creator and writer of MICRA, Writer and Co-plotter of LIGHTRUNNER, founder and Executive Director for twelve years of the Atlanta Fantasy Fair, former publisher of VISIONS
Favorite Comics: WATCHMEN; UNCLE SCROOGE; Simon and Kirby's CAPTAIN AMERICA; Bill Everett's SUB-MARINER; Will Eisner's SPIRIT; and most of the stuff that Stan Lee and Jim Steranko did in the '60s
Favorite Movies: SUNSET BOULEVARD; original KING KONG; STRANGERS ON A TRAIN; many others
Favorite Science Fiction Authors: Ray Bradbury, Robert Bloch, Edgar Rice Burroughs, John D. MacDonald, Raymond Chandler (he wrote one fantasy story in his whole life)
Favorite Rock Groups: Metamorphic & Sedimentary
Role Models: Stan Lee, George Lucas, Walt Disney
Goal in Life: To be as good a comic-book author as I possibly can
Favorite Printable Pastime: Reading
Favorite Animals: Dinosaurs

Name: Susan Barrows
Born: 22 June 1956, Kansas City, KS
Occupation: Letterer, editor, dancer, ding-a-ling
Credits: Associate editor and letterer of MICRA, letterer for LIGHTRUNNER and various projects
Favorite Comics: WATCHMEN; REID FLEMING: Matt Groening and Linda Barry stuff; GNATRAT (Mark Martin is a genius)
Favorite Movies: NORTH BY NORTHWEST; SUNSET BOULEVARD; ; FASTER, PUSSYCAT! KILL! KILL!; THE GIRL CAN'T HELP IT
Favorite Bimbos In History: Nell Gwyn, King Charles II's mistress in England; Mae West; Tura Satana from FASTER, PUSSYCAT!
Favorite Rock Groups: Igneous & Oingo Boingo
Role Models: Tura Satana, Diana Rigg, Julie Newmar
Goal in Life: Live fast, die young, leave a great looking corpse, and be as happy as I possibly can be until then
Favorite Printable Pastime: Doing bizarre collages
Favorite Animals: Flamingos, the sacred totem of St. Rhonda of the Floozies.

"So I got my Master's Degree at 20."

answering the phone as soon as I could. Everyone wanted to know what he said, and I'm going, "Shhh, don't, he hasn't seen it." So I went back to Lamar's office and got an old CBG and taped the tear sheet which they'd sent me on to a random issue, put it on the bottom of a stack about ten inches high, took them out to Lamar and said, "They sent me a tear sheet on that surprise ad I did for MICRA, and I figured since it's not here yet I might surprise you. It's somewhere in this pile." He picked up the first one and started looking. I felt bad so I said, "It's on the bottom." He pulled out the bottom one and that was when I noticed I had *accidentally* chosen the one about the Spidey/Mary Jane wedding that had a headline on the front cover that went "WEBBING BELLS." *(Laughter.)*

And he got a big hoot out of it, but he was real secretive and real vague and said, "Well, okay, you'll know what my answer is when they *print* it." I was thinking he's got to say yes, there's no way he could humiliate me in public — on the other hand people probably would have applauded his stand there. But I figured he *had* to accept. I contacted **Owen and Linda Ogletree** here in Atlanta, running Dixie Trek, to ask if they would consider hosting a wedding.

LAMAR: They added a lot of good comic stuff this year, including the MICRA team and **George Perez.**

SUSAN: I thought it would be a wonderful occasion to be able to share with everyone. But he kept me on edge. I told him the Dixie Trek people said they would be glad to host it, and he seemed to think that was a good idea, but it was all kind of vague. And I'm wondering, "How many paragraphs will his reply run? He's a *writer*!" I thought it was going to be WAR AND PEACE on a postage stamp, I'd have to read the whole thing and then figure out exactly *what* he meant. I got the issue and opened it up, and there, up in the letters section was a heart with nothing in it but, "YES! LOVE, LAMAR." I *knew* he couldn't weasel out of it, though. *(Laughter.)*

LAMAR: Well, I didn't *want* to weasel out of it.

PETER: *Now, both of you came to comics from other fields. You've been in psychology, Lamar, could you tell us about that?*

LAMAR: Well, when I was a teenager I spent my summers down in South Georgia working on my grandparent's farm. It was a real valuable experience. I learned about rural life, got outdoors and got some exercise —

SUSAN: He really was part of a chain gang. *(Laughter.)*

LAMAR: — plus I earned a lot of comics money. But I came to realize that I didn't really want to do any kind of outdoor manual labor for a living. Later, I worked part-time at General Motors, and learned I didn't like that, either. One of my favorite TV shows then was THE BOB NEWHART SHOW. Here was **Bob Newhart,** he got to sit in a nice clean office, nice clothes, never got his hands dirty, and made money by talking to people. I decided psychology was the thing for me. I always enjoyed talking to people, helping with problems, so when I hit college I decided that was what I would study. At the time the draft was still going and I didn't want to go to Vietnam. There was a loophole that said they didn't draft seniors out of college, so I decided I'd be

---

PETER: *A college senior the rest of your life!*

LAMAR: Well, an 18-year-old college senior is what I'd be. By skipping my senior year in high school and taking summer classes and overloads and everything, I became a college senior when I was eighteen, and didn't get drafted. Ironically **Nixon** ended the draft, later that year. I didn't think that he would. So I whizzed through, got my Bachelor's at 19, and my Master's a year later. And in kind of an odd way, without much life experience, I was suddenly helping people with their problems. The one field I was really obviously qualified in was adolescent psychology, since I was barely out of adolescence myself.

From LIGHTRUNNER, by Waldron, Whigham and Barrows. "Faster-than-light."

A GALAXY AWAY, THE LIGHTRUNNER SPEEDS TOWARD ADUL SARA...
BURNE, YOU'VE SPENT THE WHOLE TRIP MAKING EYES AT TAK. WHAT KIND OF PERVERT ARE YOU?
OH? IS THERE ANYONE ELSE ON THIS SHIP MORE INTERESTING TO LOOK AT?
ACTUALLY, I'VE BEEN TRYING TO RE-ESTABLISH A MIND-LINK WITH TAK, BUT SO FAR IT SEEMS TO BE A ONE-WAY STREET.
DO YOU THINK YOUR FATHER WILL GIVE YOU THE PASS TO HIS RETREAT ON VERDEN-4?
HE'D DO ANYTHING TO GET ME OUT OF HIS HAIR. I'LL *REALLY* NEED A REST FROM YOU AND TAK AFTER ALL THIS IS OVER.
WHAT ABOUT THE SHUTTLE? YOU CAN'T TAKE THIS SHIP THROUGH THE ATMOSPHERE
BESIDES— I DIDN'T THINK YOU CARED
DON'T GET ANY IDEAS.
STRAP IN— WE'RE DROPPING TO SUB-LIGHT SPEED

© 1987 Waldron and Whigham

"I had a roommate named Bob Burden."

SUSAN: You still aren't! *(Laughter.)*

LAMAR: I started working with juvenile delinquents. I eventually became the director of the counselling center for state of Georgia, working with hard-core repeat juvenile offenders. We had the lowest recidivism rate of any treatment center in the state. I had a *great* staff working for me, most of them considerably older than I was.

SUSAN: He beat them with car aerials, too.

LAMAR: I found all of the ways around the petty state regulations so that we could give them the kind of treatment they really deserved. I basically organized my way out of a job there. *(Laughter.)* By hiring good people it kind of ran itself. I was spending my breaks thinking about science fiction books and comic books I wanted to write.

And I started writing one, called LIGHTRUNNER. Luckily, I met Susan at a convention in 1977, and there was two guys there showing their portfolios around. One was **Scott Hampton,** who was obviously talented. Then Susan introduced me to **Rod Whigham** and I took a look at his work — really neat stuff.

SUSAN: He was very quiet and a little self effacing, but a real nice guy. I would go to people who were looking for artists and suggest people I knew, and he was someone who showed a lot of promise.

LAMAR: Rod & I struck up a conversation. I was talking about this story idea I had, untitled at the time.

At a convention later that summer we were sitting around, and Susan was making all of these wisecracks. I had never really been around her that much and was quite entertained by her. Rod and I were talking about this "faster-than-light" story idea about a guy whose companion was this intelligent telepathic alien creature and we had a lot of *similar* story ideas about these concepts. There were some differences but a lot more similarities, and we kind of fed off each other's creativity and enthusiasm. We decided to work together. I wrote up the story based on the stuff he and I had talked about, gave it to Rod and he started drawing it. And I had a friend then named **Gary Cook** who —

SUSAN: Yeah! Like he only had one friend. *(Laughter.)*

LAMAR: Well, Gary wanted to be a comics writer and artist. He and I decided that we would do a fanzine to feature a story he had written and drawn, and call it VISIONS, and we included the one I had written and Rod had drawn, with Susan drafted to letter it.

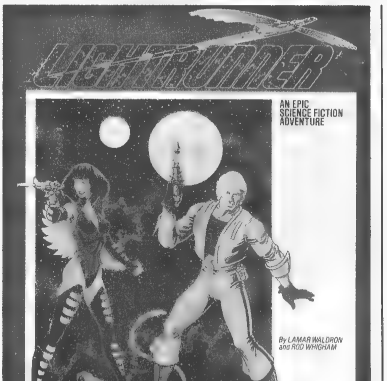
SUSAN: I also used to hawk it at conventions. I *loved* it, everyone would ask me, "Do you have VISIONS?" I'd say, "Do I look like **Jeane Dixon**?" *(Laughter.)* I can't resist a straight line.

LAMAR: I also had a roommate by the name of **Bob Burden.** Bob had always done these weird little cartoons, one of which was a goofy thing called the Flaming Carrot. He decided he would do the Flaming Carrot for the magazine. Bob did his Flaming Carrot story in a rush at the last minute, but it was real creative and interesting. VISIONS came out in the middle of a snowstorm at a convention in

"It took me years to sell all of these Neal Adams' covered VISIONS #1 at $4.00 each. Now they're worth $100.00 and up!"

© 1987 Neal Adams

"She's certifiable, she really is."



The cover of the Donning/Starblaze graphic novel LIGHTRUNNER. Any resemblance to Lanie and Susan (see facing photo) is purely intentional.

Atlanta that winter. We sold about five copies. We started to think, "Hey, we printed 1,000 of these, maybe we won't sell them all." Then a guy came and said, "Hey, my copy has a drafting diagram over the Flaming Carrot story." So we discovered that 200 out of the 1,000 had been overprinted with a drafting diagram.

SUSAN: But was it an interesting diagram?

LAMAR: No, they were useless. Today people would attribute it to Bob's creativity. At the time it was obvious it was a print defect. So those got trashed.

But, I had really *enjoyed* writing LIGHTRUNNER. I liked working with Rod, seeing the ideas I came up with translated into visual reality by a talented artist; and Rod was the kind of artist that liked to be in on the coplotting and stuff, so that was fun to do.

SUSAN: His ideas were wonderful. We had brainstorming sessions with the three of us together coming up with ideas; Rod and Lamar going on and on about things, off on tangents, and me cutting in and kibitzing.

LAMAR: Well, not just kibitzing, but Susan was kind of the editor even then. She would kind of —

SUSAN: Oh, I'd nitpick!

LAMAR: But she would nitpick when we had inconsistent details, or she would say, "Hey, get back on track." And when we were actually doing LIGHTRUNNER itself, I would give Susan my typed script to letter and she would do her wonders with the spelling and the grammar and the punctuation; and she along with Rod would act as the editorial voice.

PETER: *And is it true that there's a distinct resemblance between Susan and Lanie, not just visually but in terms of personality?*

LAMAR: Oh, yeah, I never got back to that. Rod and I were talking about the story that would become LIGHTRUNNER, there at the Fantasy Fair, and Susan was kibitzing with **Steranko** and cracking wise. We said, "Yeah, there ought to be this character, this wisecracking young woman who's real sharp and everything." Susan was the perfect model for the woman who became one of the leads in LIGHTRUNNER.

SUSAN: I was the only girl you knew with a sense of humor, admit it.

LAMAR: Well, Susan has one of the best senses of humor of *anybody*, male or female, that I know.

SUSAN: That's the only way to function. That was the only way I could deal with life. I admit it, I'm bugfuck, I'm DERANGE-O. *(Laughter.)*

LAMAR: She's certifiable, she really is.

SUSAN: I am! It's a homogenous sort of crazy where I try to be as happy as I possibly can. Without being dangerous I've *always* been that way.

PETER: *How did you first get involved with the Atlanta Fantasy Fair?*

LAMAR: Well, years ago my friends and I used to go to these comics conventions out in Houston because there weren't any in Atlanta. But, the hotel and the air fares were expensive. After a few years we figured we could hold our own convention in Atlanta, and even if it lost money we'd still come out ahead because we wouldn't have to be paying all of this money for hotel rooms and air fares. So we local people got together. **John Ulrich** suggested the name Fantasy Fair since it wasn't going to be just comics but would have science fiction and movies, too. So we organized it and got **Stan Lee** as our first guest and put it on. We were expecting 200 or 300 people, and 500 showed up.

After that first year there was some internal dissension. Part of that group wanted to split off. So, one of the original people, along with myself, hooked up with **Bob Burden** and we put on the second one. I think that was the first one Susan ever attended. Did you go to the one at the Marriott?

SUSAN: In '76? Yeah, I was there. Rod was there, and **Dick Giordano** was looking through his stuff, and **Steve Gerber** didn't show up for the panel. It was in a basement, wasn't it? Or was it a parking garage?

LAMAR: The dealer's room was in a parking garage the size of three football fields. We had less than a tenth of it filled. HOWARD THE DUCK was hot. The original team of the comic was **Frank Brunner** and **Steve Gerber,** but **Brunner** had quit and no one knew exactly

© 1987 Waldron and Whigham

"I admit it, I'm bugfuck, I'm DERANGE-O."

why, so that was all the talk. So we thought, "Hey, wouldn't it be neat to have **Frank Brunner** and **Steve Gerber** at one convention! Hey, we'll put them on a *panel* together!" *(Laughter.)*

SUSAN: I saw it! I saw half of them! **Gerber** didn't show up for the panel. *(Laughter.)* **Brunner** did a great job. Somebody took his beer can afterwards, and that's when I realized there was a certain sort of cachet involved in . . . it's like these people were *stars*. My first involvement with comics was when I was a kid, my mother would allow Harvey comics. She died when I was nine, and then I got steeped in *decandence* by reading JIMMY OLSEN and LOIS LANE and "The Legion of Super-Heroes" in ADVENTURE. Even the ones that **Shooter** was writing years ago, before they credited the writers or artists, I thought his stories were real imaginative.

LAMAR: Did he write "The Ghost of Ferro Lad!"? That was about the only DC story I remember liking.

SUSAN: I remember when Ferro Lad first showed up, when they inducted the new members and faced the Fatal Five. I mean *that* was epic. That was almost Marvelian stuff for DC to do.

LAMAR: So you were a *big* DC fan as a kid? Here I've just married you and I'm finding out you're more of a DC follower than a Marvelite! *(Laughter.)* It sounds like the DC you liked best was the one most like Marvel, though.

SUSAN: Well, I liked THE INFERIOR FIVE, too.

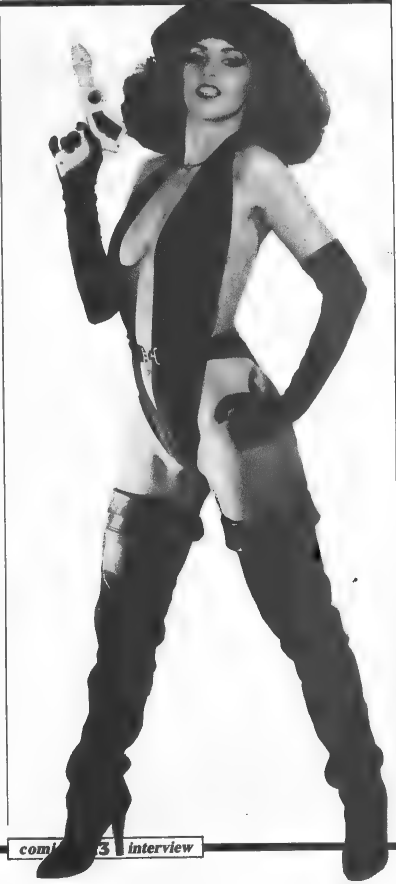
LAMAR: Oh, my God! *(Laughter.)*

SUSAN: **Joe Orlando** is a god. That stuff was wonderful. **E. Nelson Bridwell.** At that stage of my life I was alone, I was a geeky kid. One year I practiced paperback book witchcraft, which went nowhere, except I did have a whole church praying for me. I gave that up as one of those adolescent fixations. It was very amusing.

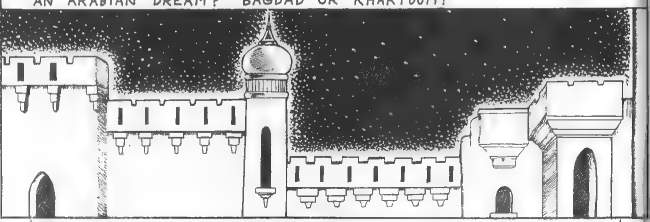
PETER: *Well, at the conventions you became known as one of the leading contenders in the costume contents.*

SUSAN: No, that's a myth! I always looked like more of a *threat* than I actually was.

LAMAR: Well, let's try and set this up a little bit. The Fantasy Fair kept growing. A lot of different staff people would come and go, but I usually got what I wanted as far as who the guests were going to be and what movies were shown. I was lucky. The Fantasy Fair pretty much got to express what I thought a good convention was all about, for all of those years. And it just kept *growing* until it was like a full-time job. It was like this monster



"The Official Bimbo of the Fantasy Fair."


A DEEP VELVET NIGHT LIES OVER THE ANCIENT CITY, IT'S STARRY LIGHT GIVING THE SPIRES AND MINARETS AN UNEARTHLY GLOW. AN ARABIAN DREAM? BAGDAD OR KHARTOUM?

"My first attempt at writing (and drawing and inking and lettering) comics. It was supposed to be in VISIONS #1, but I drew too slowly and found I enjoyed just writing LIGHTRUNNER even more."

© 1987 Waldron

that you had to keep feeding with all of your time. Well, in terms of giving people an enjoyable convention and promoting it properly, I could tell our costume contests were a popular event. We started holding them in this auditorium that would seat 2,000 people. That's a lot of chairs, and you don't want to have a lot of *empty* chairs. And you're having a lot of amateur costumes up there, some which are great and some which aren't. So I came up with the idea of having Susan, who had won —

SUSAN: He said, "Say, I know somebody I can exploit!" *(Laughter.)*

LAMAR: It was like, "Well, we could use some visual excitement up there." Susan was really popular, so we started letting Susan help with the costume contest, and she became known as a real visual symbol of the Fantasy Fair. We started using her —

SUSAN: The Official Bimbo of the Fantasy Fair.

LAMAR: — in our advertising and our progress reports, using Susan along with the emblem that **Steranko** designed. That came to symbolize the Fantasy Fair. From a marketing standpoint when you're —

SUSAN: I'm marketed, oh, no!

LAMAR: — trying to tell people about a convention that encompasses comics and science fiction and movies and all, you need some easily indentifiable symbols, and Susan happened to be a very easy one —

SUSAN: A couple of them! *(Laughter.)*

PETER: *What do you think it takes to make a good comics convention?*

LAMAR: What makes a good comics con is the same thing that makes a good science-fiction con, a good movie con, a good fantasy con. A lot of people out there who aren't *just* fans of comics, they aren't *just* fans of movies, they aren't *just* fans of science fiction, but they like a lot of things. That was one of my personal philosophies that the Fantasy Fair tried to express, to take the best of *all* of those elements and combine them, putting comics on at least an equal footing.

And to me a good convention is also one that has really interesting guests who really *care* about their work. We didn't feature a lot of actors because a lot of them are people to whom acting in perhaps a thing like STAR TREK was just a job. That was a role that they played and that

"My experience as an exotic dancer helped."

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I REALIZE NOW THAT THERE'S A HUGE WORLD OUT THERE BEYOND THE DOMES...
WHAT WAS IT REALLY LIKE OUTSIDE?
I REMEMBER A WIDE OPEN SKY, WHERE BIRDS FLEW FREE...
...SNOW CLINGING TO THE FEW TREES WHICH WERE LEFT.
EVEN THEN, THE TREES WERE DYING.
SLOWLY KILLED BY FUMES FROM THE INDUSTRIAL PARK.
MY PARENTS HATED WORKING THERE, BUT IT WAS ALL THEY COULD FIND.
THEY SCRIMPED ON EVERYTHING--
--INCLUDING THEIR OWN MEDICAL CARE--
--JUST TO BUY ME A PLACE INSIDE.
CANCER TOOK BOTH OF THEM.
I'M SORRY, ERIC.
THAT'S HOW I LOST MY MOTHER.
THAT MAKES US BOTH ORPHANS.

A tender Romeo and Juliet twist, as Angela (MICRA) learns to accept the outsider-origin of Eric, unaware of her own outsider origin. From MICRA #1.

was it. There are exceptions. **Walter Koenig,** for instance, is a fan, does read science fiction, and he's got things to say. But there are others — who are nice guys so I won't name names — to whom it's just a job. I didn't have that kind of guest at the Fantasy Fair. We almost *never* paid fees to our speakers. They took the time out of their careers to come — we would pay their air fare and hotel and their food, maybe — because they liked science fiction or comic books. We had some fantastic panels. One in particular I remember had **Chuck Jones, Wendy Pini,** and **Theodore Sturgeon.** And you may think, "Cartoons, comic books, science fiction, what's the connection?" They all involve storytelling to one degree or another. So that's what always made a good con to me. But because I had to run the show, I never got to enjoy it.

SUSAN: I always used to kind of wickedly *enjoy* seeing Lamar at the end of a Fantasy Fair. It reduced him to a mere human. He ran everything, did all of the organizational stuff, knew exactly what anyone was doing at a given time; but the toll it took on him, he would be in a *fugue* state. He would be a zombie, a robot. And the Fantasy Fair, when it was good it was a *wonderful* thing. I liked the camaraderie. It pushed me to the limits of what I thought I could do. Always at the last minute they'd need somebody to do something. I would volunteer before I realized what I was doing, and I'd find myself up on stage, winging it. My experience as an exotic dancer helped — but even while fully dressed, the lack of musical smokescreen made me feel *naked.*

LAMAR: Susan's ability to work under pressure saved the Fantasy Fair on many occasions. While she started off as a spokesmodel, she also had a lot of talent as a graphic designer and a pasteup artist.

SUSAN: Oh, talent is serendipitous. If something needs to be done I'll try it and I'll do it. I don't consider that talent.

LAMAR: But it is, because most people can't do it. But getting back to Fantasy Fair —

SUSAN: It was fun because I'd wing it and it was spontaneous and I'd do it to help you out.

LAMAR: And I appreciated that.

SUSAN: Yeah, you better have, you weasel. *(Laughter.)*

LAMAR: I was always a real perfectionist, you know, trying to get great guests, and getting more than we'd had the previous year and everything. We'd go until the last minute before we'd print up our progress reports, and it was nice knowing that you could always call on Susan and she would drop whatever else she was doing, take time off of work, come over, and do the design layout and the pasteup.

SUSAN: I was *young* then! I'm 30, pushing 31, don't expect it anymore.

LAMAR: And she was a good friend and a real fan of the medium.

SUSAN: I was a good friend and a real fan and a selfless jerk. I'm still working on the same system. I've often said that on MICRA I am kind of a mixture between an endurance masochist, **Hunter S. Thompson,** and a little bit of **Charles "Texas Tower" Whitman.** The siege mentality comes in when I start working seriously.

PETER: *Who were the best guests at the Fantasy Fair, the most memorable ones?*

SUSAN: Favorite guests. I like to run into someone who is a kindred spirit and then hang out with them, such as our interviewer.

PETER: *Oh, thank you.*

SUSAN: Alan Weiss was wonderful at the last Fantasy Fair. **John Ostrander,** the year before. Just to meet sombody that's got the same sort of. . .I don't know if I

"It's too bad that being a bawd has been

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WELL, THE MORONS ARE BACK. I HOPE YOU GOT SOME GOOD STUFF!
LOOK AT THESE!
HEADLINE! COMICS! ARTICLES! BALLOON TALES!

BONUS! The very first appearance of that well-known conflagrating Umbelliferae — the Flaming Carrot, published by Lamar in VISIONS.

want to say warped, but I'll say warped as applied to myself, but I guess in this context it might reflect badly on people I'm mentioning.

PETER: *Unusual.*

LAMAR: Broad-minded. *(Laughter.)*

SUSAN: Or *bored*-minded. Creative, witty people to whom I'm not some drooling, libidinous fan. I like being treated as one of the guys. *(Cuckoo clock strikes hour.)* Oh, no! *(Laughter.)* **Chuck Jones** was wonderful! We watched DUCK DODGERS IN THE TWENTY-FOURTH-AND-A-HALF CENTURY from backstage, this real parallax angle, and it took awhile to dawn on me that the person to whom I was talking was somebody who had been involved with it. A lot of times I have been *so* disappointed when I have met people who were my idols.

LAMAR: Like a certain famous science-fiction writer.

SUSAN: Ack! **Norman Spinrad.** I'd read THE VOID CAPTAIN'S TALE and it knocked me on my ass; which is a considerable expanse here, so it had to be a good book, right? It was fresh in my mind when I ran into **Norman Spinrad** one night at the '84 World con in L.A., holding court in the Hilton corridor. I waited so as not to interrupt, and the first moment I had I told him, "**Mr. Spinrad,** I dearly loved THE VOID CAPTAIN'S TALE." He shifted his drink into his other hand and glared at me and said to his friends, "I don't know who these people are, they just come *up* to me . . ." He was abusive! I felt wretched, but he was wearing his namebadge with **NORMAN SPINRAD** in big block letters. If he didn't want people gravitating to him he should have removed it. I was horribly disappointed. I never picked up another one of his books.

PETER: *So Jones was better than Spinrad, contrasting the two.*

SUSAN: Oh yeah. A sterling attitude is important to me. I tried to understand NORM, but — there's something about adulation that makes *me* uncomfortable, and signing autographs for MICRA? I'm very flattered, but I can't take it seriously as if I've done something important. I've helped out friends. If I'm doing a good job I find enough solace in that. I'm very *nervous* about celebrity, such as being the emcee and poster girl and all, back when the Fantasy Fair was going. I just kind of shift into a higher gear and go through it. But I avoid anybody that would give me a rough time, the same way I tend to avoid parts of life about which I have to be more serious, and fortunately Lamar can take care of that now. Life is going to be nothing but laughs from now on, right?

LAMAR: Really.

SUSAN: That wasn't very convincing! *(Laughter.)*

LAMAR: Well, something you said, the greatest analogy I ever said about your dancing —

SUSAN: You can't spell analogy without anal, I want that on the record. I hope the ANALOG people don't get back to me.

LAMAR: Susan stopped dancing for awhile and was working as a restaurant hostess, and she pointed out something I had never realized, in how she had to relate to customers as a hostess and how she had to relate to customers as a dancer . . .

SUSAN: I had to be totally unlike myself as a hostess. I had to do the frozen smile and the yes-give-me-abuse-I-love-it, but deep down inside I had all of these wisecracks coming up. I finally had to quit the job. A week later I'm in the grips of stomach flu, 11:00 o'clock at night, my former boss calls me up *begging* me to come back to work to hostess. In a weak moment I said, "Okay, I'll do it, now let me go, I have to puke again." And I was back to work the next day, but it was on *my* terms. And there is a side of me I call affectionately Suzie the Floozie — it's where the **Rusty Warren** mode shifts in —

LAMAR: Rusty Warren was the female **Richard Pryor** of the early '60s.

SUSAN: She was more than that. She was one of the bimbo goddesses of my pantheon. Her puns — one of her albums was called KNOCKERS UP. That's the way I tend to function. It's too bad that being

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equated with being sluttish and cheap."

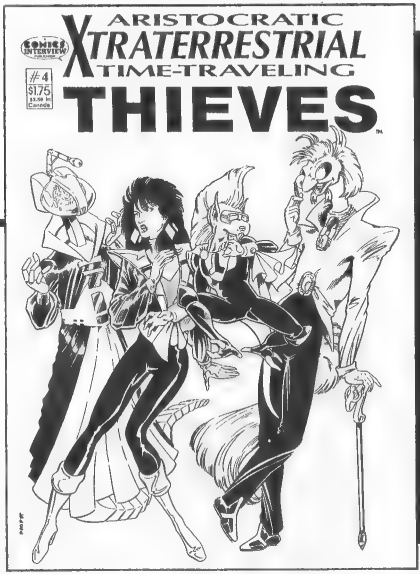
a bawd has been equated with being promiscuous and stupid and sluttish and cheap. But actually, coquetting is truly an art. It's a mode I shift into very easily. I think of it as a lot of fun. There is a preconceived attitude about dancers, that they're stupid and tramps. Oh, I've worked with a few stupid tramps, I won't deny that but a lot of the girls were divorcees with children to support, or coeds working towards degrees —

LAMAR: We used to joke about them all forming a sorority sometime.

SUSAN: It was going to be called Coppa Feela Thigh. *(Laughter.)* The dancing industry is different in Atlanta, it's almost wholesome. Go-go girls are like a big crazy, supportive family.

LAMAR: I agree. One thing that helped me understand what Susan saw in dancing as a vocation was that when she was a hostess at Victoria Station, like she was saying, if she had bad customers there she had to grin and bear it, that was it —

"Coquetting is truly an art. It's a mode I shift into very easily." "We used to joke about them all forming a sorority sometime." "It was going to be called Coppa Feela Thigh. (Laughter.)"



What happens when every alien with twitchy fingers decides it's easy to be a thief? An explosion of independents! And we all know what that means, don't we -- the days of easy money are over! Fred & Bianca find themselves at the mercy of the market (and, as any Cirulean school child can tell you, the market has no mercy). Can even Fred & Bianca defy the implacable -- market forces?

GLUT!

NEED WE SAY MORE?

A COMICS INTERVIEW PUBLICATION

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"Now I'm proud not to be with the Fair."

from LIGHTRUNNER.

WHERE DID THAT COME FROM?
I KNOW IT'S HARD TO BELIEVE BUT I THINK IT'S THE CREATURE I MET ON EVON 4! COULD IT HAVE FOLLOWED ME?
DON'T GET TOO CLOSE!

SUSAN: Sometimes I didn't, and that was the fun part. *(Laughter.)*

LAMAR: But while she was dancing if somebody was rude or something —

SUSAN: I could mete out real zingers. If I met somebody who was acting like a moron, surrounded by his friends who were obviously embarrassed by his behavior — I'd give him a quarter and say, "Here, go buy yourself a personality."

PETER: *Oooo.*

SUSAN: Yeah, people that *deserved* it. Maybe there's a bit of Rorschach in me, I don't know. But, you know, a good comeuppance, even if it's my own, has always been a prevailing theme with me. I always enjoy a good comeuppance. And God, sometimes I've set myself up. Many times I've been on stage with these inflated preconceived ideas about how *everything* will run smoothly, and all of a sudden the sound system quits, and all of the seams are showing. I think that's part of the glamor of it, being able to wing it through that. It's like on MOONLIGHTING when they look at the camera to acknowledge that it's just a bunch of people putting something on. There are failures and things that go wrong, but that's part of the cachet. I enjoy it.

On the other hand with MICRA I am *so tense* with anxiety. It's something that's really amazing, and I was in on this on the ground floor, the seminal development of it. MICRA is so professional. I'm really on pins and needles dealing with that. Luckily there's still a few fun things to do. *(Susan leaves to answer the phone.)*

PETER: *And Lamar — who were your favorite guests?*

LAMAR: My favorite guests, I actually have to say they've almost all been favorites, but these are like the extra extra favorites. **Stan Lee** — He's the greatest comics writer who ever lived. The first year he came he was still editor of Marvel Comics, but it was kind of weird. He was always a lot of fun, and it was great having him there. He's the tops.

Probably the most *fun* guest we had was **Jim Steranko**, who was a type of personality you don't see at conventions anymore. He was the **Harlan Ellison** of comic books and no one's really stepped forward to take his place. I really admired his stories and artwork and I hope someday he'll write and draw more comic books.

PETER: *And who else?*

LAMAR: Forrest Ackerman. He's just the nicest guy in the world. We found out that he had worn the first costume at the first science-fiction convention ever held, back in '39, and he had probably been to more conventions than any other ten people put together and multiplied by three, but he had never been the MC at a costume contest, so I said, "Hey, what a logical neat thing to do!" So we had Forry MC our costume contest, and let's just say the results were very interesting. Forry has a knack for puns, so bad that they're good, the kind of thing people love to hate. *(Laughter.)*

PETER: *I could tell from his taped wedding message to you and Susan.*

LAMAR: Yes. Everyone loves him. He's the kind of guest who ought to be at Fantasy Fair every year. That's one reason I'm not working on Fantasy Fair anymore. I think the truly creative people behind the scenes who are real fans, like **Forry Ackerman** or **Ray Harryhausen** or **Chuck Jones** or **Stan Lee,** are far more interesting than some actor who just played a role. I can say in all honesty that with the direction the Atlanta Fantasy Fair is going in now I'm proud *not* to be associated with it.

PETER: *Let's pick up where we left off on LIGHTRUNNER.*

LAMAR: Well, I think we'd ended the story when VISIONS #1 came out and we lost a lot of money on it, but we produced something we were all pretty proud of. We were crazy and so a year later, without Gary, we decided to do VISIONS #2. Rod did the cover, the main feature was LIGHTRUNNER, and we had another Flaming Carrot story and other artwork by various people. Well, I didn't lose as

NOW I REMEMBER!
THIS IS WHAT I WAS LOOKING FOR ON EVON 4! THEY'RE CALLED TAKLEO-DANTES-- THEIR VENOM MAKES THE MOST POWERFUL MIND-LINK DRUG KNOWN!

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"The Fantasy Fair became a monster that

much money on VISIONS #2 as I did on #1, even though I was the only one doing it. It was still a money-losing proposition, so what I did with #3 was turn it over to the Fantasy Fair to act as the program book, and I remained as editor and everything. This way contributors got paid a little bit of cash and a lot of contributors copies for their work, and I no longer lost money.

Well, I read that Donning/Starblaze was looking for projects. We had three VISIONS done by then, three chapters of LIGHTRUNNER. I bundled it all together and sent it off to **Kay Reynolds,** the editor, and sure, enough got back a response saying they were interested. VISIONS #4 came out with the fourth of the five chapters that compose LIGHTRUNNER before they finally decided to make a go of it. They were ready, the contracts were signed, it was 1983, January, and I decided it was time for me to end my career as director of a counselling center. I felt I had accomplished what I wanted to do there. I thought, "I'll quit counselling to write full-time " — thinking LIGHTRUNNER would be the first of *many* writing projects.

I got LIGHTRUNNER written — we basically had six months for me to rewrite all of the early chapters and to write the final chapter, for Rod to repencil a couple of the early chapters and pencil and ink the last chapter and color the whole ball of wax. Susan did all of the lettering. It was an incredibly tight schedule. And if you needed anybody to keep you amused and entertained and interested when you had gone three or four days without sleep Susan could do it. Plus she knew spelling and grammer.

PETER: *Had Susan done any sort of lettering before?*

LAMAR: She was learning on the job. All of us were. Rod was a good artist but had never drawn comics before, he taught himself. I taught myself as a writer. Susan taught herself as a letterer and editor. We also taught each other. That's something I think was really good for us. Rod didn't want to draw anything he didn't think was well written; I couldn't write over a panel I didn't think was well drawn; Susan certainly *wouldn't* letter a single word that wasn't spelled right, punctuated correctly. If there was any way to make it more concise she would *suggest* it. *(Laughter.)* We all had some basic raw talent and we really helped each other, but those six months were really rough. Well, LIGHTRUNNER managed to come out just in time for Black September back in 1983.

PETER: *Which is when?*

LAMAR: Which is when, as with the black-and-white glut today, it was a similar thing where there was too much product on the market. The market shrank rapidly, just as LIGHTRUNNER came out. It still managed to sell pretty well in the bookstores. B. Daltons sold most of their order, and Waldenbooks sold it quite well. We did somewhere between 10,000 and 12,000 copies, which I didn't think was too bad. That's over $100,000 in retail sales, the equivalent of an awful lot of comic books, so we were happy. Sales

"I saw the domes as being very interesting for another reason. It's not hard to imagine who would get to live in those domes. . . those who can pay the most." Below: The Outside. and Opposite: Inside the domes. MICRA background reference.

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demanded more and more of my time."

in the direct market weren't great because of Black September. The Fantasy Fair became an ever growing monster that demanded more and more of my time. It became a full-time job. It didn't pay well. I was making probably on the order of $1.00 an hour. I felt it was important to keep money going back into the Fantasy Fair, so as long as I could live that was okay, that was all I needed. Luckily the Fantasy Fair grew to the point eventually where I could at least get a sustaining salary, but it *did* demand an awful lot of my time.

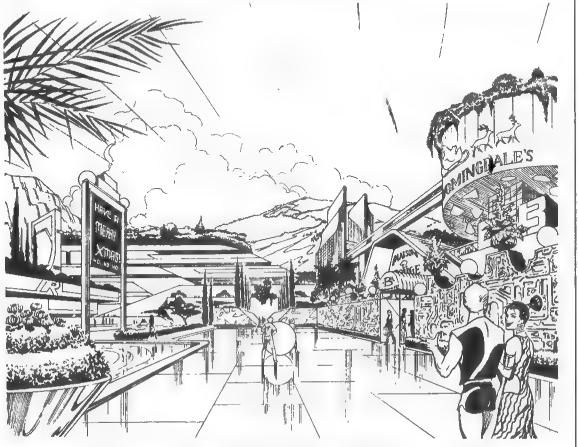
PETER: *And how did MICRA come about?*

LAMAR: Back when the earth was still cooling, back in 1982 when I was the director of the treatment center, I read THE CHRISTIAN SCIENCE MONITOR. I'm not an especially religious person, but it's a good source of news, and occasionally science reporting. Well, they had an article about air-supported domes. It was a good article focusing on efforts by the Canadian government and certain research scientists to build these huge clear plastic domes. They were looking into these things for mining communites way up in the far far north where the climate is harsh. But you put one of these plastic bubbles there and suddenly you'd have the climate of Atlanta or even better.

This suggested a lot of interesting story possibilities. It sounded so neat. Buildings could be made out of almost any kind of material. What weathering could happen in a closed environment like that? And around that same time I was fascinated with the idea of a female cyborg character. My research into cybernetics showed that coming up with a robot that could *think* like a human seemed to be a long way off. So what I thought was there's got to be a way to combine the human brain with the strength and other properties you could build into robots. I combined my two stories there into one, thinking that would give it a certain depth and richness. I saw the domes as being very interesting for another reason, too. I saw how a society that would develop in that kind of setting could really be different from the societies we know now. It would be very homogenous. And it's not hard to imagine who would get to live in those domes. It's going to be those who can pay the most.

PETER: *And so you get to do a comment through this science fiction exaggeration on the gap betweeen the rich and the poor.*

LAMAR: Exactly. I guess you could describe me as a real conservative liberal when it comes to politics, or a cynical realist or something. I basically believe in social justice and egalitarianism and a lot of liberal ideals, but I think most liberal politicians go about achieving them all wrong. They ignore certain economic realities and certain realities of human nature. And I think comics shouldn't exist only for entertainment. Comics are a very important and valuable tool, too much so to be limited only to that; not that entertaining comics are bad, but I want to see comics that do more than *just* entertain, and so I thought I'd write one. In MICRA, it isn't really obvious, but the message is there nonetheless, and I think in some cases all the more effective. First I started writing it as a prose novel. It was a lot of fun extrapolating current scientific theory almost 100 years into the future. But as I was writing the book I kept say-



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"WaRP was interested in publishing MICRA."

ing, "This would make a really neat comic book," because Angela the quadriplegic heroine transfers her thoughts to a robotic body, MICRA; MICRA in turn sends sensory feedback, visual, auditory, tactile stimulation, back to her brain. That can be sort of hard to deal with in prose, in terms of MICRA says or Angela says, MICRA thinks or Angela thinks. In the comic you don't have those problems, either the word balloon is coming from Angela or from MICRA — but the reader understands in any event it's Angela's brain that's behind it.

PETER: *Also the robot does superheroic sort of things and that lends itself to a visual medium.*

LAMAR: Exactly. That was to increase the contrast of the helpless mind in the strong body.

So I was ready to do another graphic novel. Rod was drawing G.I. JOE, so I turned to another artist friend of mine, **Tom Gonzales,** a well-known Atlanta illustrator. I figured it would take roughly 360 pages to tell the story, or about three volumes. The reception from the major comics companies was polite, but cold — they felt the market really wasn't ripe for a series of three full-color graphic novels, especially by unknowns.

PETER: *And at this point you really wanted to do it as a graphic novel and not as a maxi-series.*

LAMAR: Yeah. But maybe it was a bit too massive. One has to remember the commercial considerations. And the other assessment they had was that Tom was a good illustrator from a technical point of view but his figure work need a lot of work to be more fluid for comics, and that if he was going to be too heavily dependent on photo reference he was going to be in for a rough time. If you have to photo reference *everything* that gets into a lot of time and money with models and shoots and that sort of thing. So we were discouraged, but we sent it off to the other publishers like Eclipse and WaRP anyway. We heard back from everybody we sent it to, and I appreciate the time they took to even look at it.

WaRP sent us back a proposal suggesting that they might be interested in publishing MICRA in black-and-white, and they wanted to see some black-and-white samples. Well, a lot of people don't realize how *tough* it is to produce real comics artwork in black-and-white. You know, in comics you've just got these lines to work with. **Tom Gonzales** had never inked in a comics style before. He tried and it just didn't come out really successful. It looked too technical. So we were forced to look for other art options. Well, one of the events I started at the Fantasy Fair was the Draw-Off Sketching Competition. One of the winners the first time we had it was **Ted Boonthanakit.** I had gotten to know Ted, and we were working on a project called MIRAGE, which may or may not show up someday — a contemporary female superhero.

PETER: *One of the New Mutants is named Mirage.*

LAMAR: Yeah, I found that out after we'd done lots of work on the character, and the name was essential to the concept. I guess that's what I get for not reading many comics nowadays. Until I come up with a suitable name that's not Mirage she's got to remain in limbo. So we were faced with not being able to do *that* character, and needing an artist to do black-and-white for MICRA, so, "Hey, let's give Ted a shot at it!" Tom was real nice about everything, so Ted and I started working on MICRA. Ted didn't see Tom's work on the book before he started doing his own work. I felt it would be good to make a clean break there, too, so that it wouldn't be Ted working from Tom's designs. It helped give the comic a good fresh start, because at that point I had been working on the comic with Tom for over two years. Ted could create this world himself, doing designs and characters and settings and costumes that he's always wanted to do. So we did that, and we've got to give credit to WaRP, actually **Richard Pini,** for suggesting we try MICRA in black-and-white.

The never-before published first MICRA! Art by Tom Gonzales.

"DAK said '*you* draw up a contract.'"

And by that time — I don't think I clearly stated this before — after the turndowns from the major companies, I had reworked MICRA down from being a series of three graphic novels to being a comics series; originally a 15-issue series, later tightened and edited down to a 12-issue series. That would still make a good series of three graphic novels when each four issues were collected, but it would also tell a very clear easily understandable story in each comic book. So it looked like we were a go with WaRP, except for a couple of problems. One was they wanted to put MICRA in a comic with another series, with stories that were 14 or 15 pages long, which I felt would be a real problem. If you've got only 14 pages to work with, even if you get a recap, you still have to visually establish characters and get the whole story moving. By the time you do that in 14 pages, have some action in there, introduce some new characters and some plot development, and then wrap things up at the end, you just don't have very much room. That's a *lot* to cram into 14 pages. Another thing was the covers. Ted's a *great* painter. His training was in doing murals in airbrush and oils and acrylics, and he can throw in everything but the kitchen sink and come up with a painting that's just beautiful. But in having a combination book, it didn't lend itself real well to these big beautiful painted MICRA covers.

The third thing was the contract WaRP sent. It was a lot longer than I expected. So we began the arduous process of negotiating the contract, which took a long time once WaRP decided they definitely wanted to do the book. It took a very long time. In the meantime WaRP was getting ready to undergo reorganization — this was when they evolved into Apple/WaRP. When that came about I got a call freeing me to take MICRA somewhere else. We already had the first 14 pages written and pencilled. We were all geared up and ready, all we *need* is a publisher!

PETER: *And the closest publisher is?*

LAMAR: It happens to be this guy up in north Georgia, **David Anthony Kraft,** on top of beautiful Screamer Mountain. I had talked to him on the phone several times and had great conversations with him. Dave is a wonderful person to talk to, which is probably why he publishes COMICS INTERVIEW. He values the fine art of conversation. And sure enough, Dave was looking to expand his publishing. But he had some advice for us: Go to somebody that would pay us up front. He would sure give us a great royalty program and insure that we were compensated if the book sold well, but he wasn't in a position to pay the kind of advance money that Marvel or DC could.

And I should note at the time that going back to Marvel or DC or approaching someplace like First for the first time was certainly an option. I think if we had approached the majors they *might* have gone for it. Ted rapidly progressed in his artwork, it was incredibly professional. He learned by leaps and bounds what comics are all about. I was feeding him comics right and left. Growing up in Kenya he had limited access to comics, but I've got a huge collection built up over 20 years of what I think is the best of comics art. I would give him an **Alex Raymond** book and say, "Here, look at this!" I would show him **Virgil Finlay** and **Russ Heath** and **Frank Frazetta** and he would eat this stuff up and assimilate the best of it. His progression was astonishing. And my writing was better by that point, I had the story at a more manageable level. It was overly ambitious the way it had been originially presented.

But one thing Ted and Susan and I all knew was that MICRA could be a comic book that we could all be proud of, and eventually it would be commercially successful if we put our hearts and souls into it and worked as hard as we could; the concept was sound, the talents were sound. So we didn't want to give away the rights to the book. That was a good reason to look at an independent publisher.

PETER: *And DAK would allow you to do the book the way you wanted it, and to keep the rights?*

LAMAR: Exactly. In fact, Dave was aware that I had been negotiating with WaRP for quite a long time, and I think to save himself that much more work he even said, "Look, I don't want to go through all of that work on this contract negotiation stuff, *you* draw up a contract. If it looks good I'll sign it." So with the onus then put on me I tried to make things as *simple* as possible, so I came up with

The original Rita, MICRA's sister, by Tom Gonzales.

© 1987 Waldron and Gonzales

Comics Interview

So far, there are only four titles from David Anthony Kraft's publishing company, but I like all of them.

• *MICRA* is an acronym for *Mind Controlled Remote Automaton*. It is also one heck of a good comic book by Lamar Waldron and Ted Boonthanakit. This is a 12-issue limited series about a crippled woman who can project her consciousness into an automaton (see the title).

That is a much-too simplified summation of a rich, complex SF novel in comic-book form. Ted's art has been compared to many different American artists (none of whose work Ted has seen; he was born in Thailand and grew up in Africa) and is remarkably clear and exciting.

Grade: A.

MICRA™
MIMIC CONTROLLED REMOTE AUTOMATON

• *Aristocratic X-traterrestrial Time-Traveling Thieves* (*X-Thieves* for short) has had two first issues, which is annoying to indexers and compilers of price guides, but the bright, sprightly scripts by Henry Vogel and the appropriately humorous art of Mark Propst make up for that. One of the main features of this comic book is that, like the *Mad* comic books, the panels are filled with gags, such as the crisis hotline which warns, "New universe forming — disaster imminent!"

The Southern Knights make a guest appearance in the second first issue, in which the X-Thieves steal the formula for original Coca-Cola. This is one of the best of the funny comic books (and one of the handful that really is funny).

Grade: A

X-THIEVES™

SOUTHERN KNIGHTS™

• I haven't seen the last couple of issues of *Southern Knights* yet but, unless the series has gone radically downhill since #16, this is still one of the best and most original of all the super-groups. Grade: A.

• While *Comics Interview* is not a comic book, I think I can squeeze in a recommendation. This excellent publication gives a well-rounded view of the industry, with interviews with writers, pencillers, inkers, letterers, colorists, and others.

Naturally, your interest in an issue will depend on who is being interviewed, but there have been 40 issues of *Comics Interview* and no totally dull ones — not even the *G.I. Joe* issue. Grade: A.

Four titles. Four As. Four for four. Way to go, Dave.

— Don Thompson
COMICS BUYER'S GUIDE

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"There may yet be a MICRA prose novel."

a contract that I didn't have any complaints with. *(Laughter.)* That's indicative of the way things have gone with Dave as a publisher. He's a real straightforward down to earth kind of guy. If there's a simple way to do things, he'll do it that way, which I guess is why he lives where life is simple. *(Laughter.)*

PETER: *Are you pleased with the response to MICRA so far?*

LAMAR: That response has been *much* better than I could have *ever* imagined. I don't think we've gotten a bad review yet! I can't thank people like **Don Thompson** enough, not because he wrote a good review but because he took the time to *read* the comic and write his reviews when the comic was still fresh and on the stands. That's really important. MICRA's the kind of comic that you *have* to read to really appreciate. You can look at the art and tell the art is pretty good, but to really get the full appreciation you've got to read it, and there's a lot of words on those pages. And to *all* of the reviewers I'm just really grateful that they took the time to read it.

You know, I sent copies to a lot of writers and artists whose work I've admired over the years, and when I got responses back from people like **Stan Lee** and **Ray Bradbury** and **Robert Bloch** and people like that, it really means a lot to you that these people would take time out of their busy schedules to let you know that they enjoyed something that you did.

PETER: *What are you looking to achieve in the future as writer of MICRA, as a comic-book writer in general?*

LAMAR: Well, with MICRA this story is pretty much set, we're almost at the halfway point now with the 12-issue series. The next series is going to get more into the global situation, more into outer space, but for this series I wanted to concentrate on America. We'll take a few months break after that, but I've already got the basic story for the next 12-issue series. I'd rather not say a lot about that.

PETER: *Because that will give away what the current series is going to end up being.*

LAMAR: Yeah, and I'm one of these guys. . . I really hate seeing a comics cover that tells you exactly what happens in that comic book. Hey, Supergirl dies, and you see this *weeks* before you see the comic and, well, where's the suspense? *(Laughter.)* Somehow that just doesn't seem appealing to me. So I don't want to say a lot about what's going to be happening. But the pace will get even faster, there will be even *more* action -- we have a lot established now — and there will be a lot of surprises that will really take the reader totally off guard. I'm working really hard to keep it entertaining and surprising, because that's what I like.

PETER: *And I take it you have ideas for other series in the wind?*

LAMAR: That's true. But one more interesting thing about MICRA, it's still going to be a series of graphic novels someday. There are places in MICRA where we're going to expand what's been done. I can give you the best example, from issue #1 where from the time Angela decides to be MICRA and the Army approves it, you turn the page and she's already had this operation to implant the connectors in her head, and MICRA's been built and everything like that. That's a lot of time that just got glossed over there. For a comic book we had to do that, because we had to get MICRA *in* that first issue. For the graphic novel the intervening sequences dealing with the operation and the construction of MICRA, which exist as written narrative sequences, will be put in. These will be inserted in what's already existing.

As for other projects, Ted and I have a couple of other things we'd *love* to do, you know, once time and the market permits.

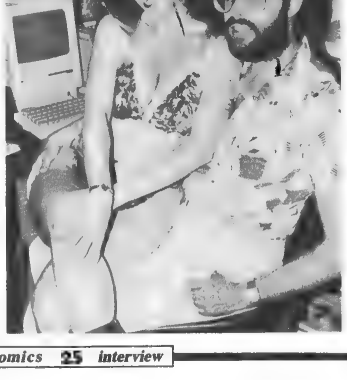
There still may yet be a MICRA prose novel someday. Eight chapters are written, I'd love to see it done that way. There are even more things that you can do in a prose novel, as far as interior monologues and getting inside Angela's mind as she's lying there, they're just very difficult and would be very boring visually in a comic book. So I'd like to do that someday, and don't be surprised if I come out with a series of MICRA paperbacks.

SUSAN: *(Reappearing)*: Is it all over but the transcribing?

PETER: *Except for a closing statement, which I'm sure you'll provide.*

SUSAN: AAGH! Performance Anxiety! Well, how about a hearty "BABALU"?

ALL: BA-BA-LOOOOOO!



"What's this story about your almost

Soon after I arranged to do an interview with MICRA creative team members Lamar Waldron and Susan Barrows, Lamar suggested I interview MICRA's artist, Ted Boonthanakit, as well. I was interested in doing so, since Ted has certainly made an impressive debut on the series. Lamar cautioned me, though, that Ted was modest and didn't easily talk about himself, so that maybe he should be there to help draw Ted out.

So I went down to Atlanta for the astounding Barrows/Waldron nuptual ceremony, about which more is said elsewhere in this very issue, with the plan of interviewing all three MICRA folks the next day. During the equally amazing wedding reception (noteworthy for the presence of a six-foot-tall inflatable Godzilla, but that's another story), it was suggested that I do the interview with Ted that very night. Of course, Lamar wouldn't be able to make it. He had other things to do, which we shall leave to the readers' imaginations.

So off a group of us went to an Atlanta restaurant: yours truly, Ted and his fashionable wife Kami (who runs K.A.M.I. Wearables in Atlanta — free plug), the omnipresent David Anthony Kraft, his operations manager Kay McGonnell, and former COMICS INTERVIEW staffer Bill Chadwick. And lo and behold, contrary to everyone's expectations, as soon as the tape recorder was switched on, Ted was off like a shot, talking away about a highly colorful life full of travels and other careers that one doesn't often find in the past of a comics professional. And afterwards I was told there were some celebrated Boonthanakit anecdotes we never got around to.

Well, maybe they'll turn up in his next interview, for Ted's career in comics has only just started, and we're sure to see a lot more of his work in the future...

PETER SANDERSON: *What did you think of Lamar and Susan's wedding? (Laughter.)*

TED BOONTHANAKIT: It was totally expected, knowing the couple who were getting married. It was refreshing, I think. It's been a long time since I've seen such participation from the guests. They did enjoy themselves, and I like to see that in a wedding.

PETER: *They responded to the cue cards.*

TED: Yes. My wedding was rather low key. *(Laughter.)*

PETER: *What's this story about your almost being killed in a drug deal?*

TED: Well, this was in Flushing, New York, I was commissioned to do a mural — it was an undersea scene — at Flushing College. My partner (Bob) who was painting with me had lots and lots of friends in college, and they were *all* drug addicts. And of course I was introduced to them, one of them asked, "Where are you from?" I said Thailand, and they all got excited; "Thailand! Can you get Thai sticks?" I *don't* do drugs, so I didn't know what Thai sticks were. The first thing that came to mind was *incense* sticks. I have plenty of those at home; my mother brought tons of them; I said yes. They said, "Could you get us some? We'll pay." "No need," I said, "I'll get you some, for free." *(Laughter.)*

They were *so* excited. They thought things like this take time, and I said I would bring them the next morning.

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TED BOONTHANAKIT

being killed in a drug deal?" "Well. . ."

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"I miss having chauffeurs terribly."

Some of the wild animals and savages Ted grew up with.

"What, really? *Cool*, man!" I walked in, I got there before Bob — Bob was my partner — thank goodness I got there *only* about a minute before Bob did; if it was longer than that I would have been dead. They met me in the stairwell, all very *secretive*, and somewhat desperate, and I thought, "What is all this? Why are these people so excited about incense sticks?" I carried this huge bag under my arm, and I opened it up, "Here you go, enjoy them!" *(Laughter.)* They sort of looked at me like, "Are you kidding us with this, man?"

I could see their faces change, in expression, and they were looking at each other like, "Hey, he's shitting with us." You know, a lot of profanities were flying, and all of a sudden Bob came running in, looking at me. He could tell right then what the story was. He got between us, pushed me away, and said, "He didn't know what Thai sticks were." Then we got away, and he spent another hour *educating* me.

PETER: *So how is it you got from Thailand to America to be mistaken for a drug dealer, and to become a renowned comic-book artist?*

TED: I left Thailand when I was nine and went straight to Kenya, East Africa. This was 1968 — most people had never heard of Kenya. The first image I had of Africa was wild animals and savages. Of course I cried my head off when I heard we were going to *Africa*. Most of my father's colleagues who had connections in the diplomatic oligarchy, they got to go the best places, London, New York, Sydney, Beirut and places like that. My father wanted to go to Beirut so bad, because then it was paradise, but we ended up in Kenya. Politics prevailed, we were there for 13 years. 2 months after we arrived in Kenya, the first bomb exploded in Beirut, and since then things have never been the same. To say the least, we were very happy in Kenya.

PETER: *What did you find that you liked about Kenya?*

TED: Everything really. It's certainly one of the most beautiful countries in the world. Nairobi, the capital city, is very small indeed but marvelously cosmopolitan, and as exciting as any modern city can get. The people are wonderful, very musical. You know, they would break into their song and dance routines at every given opportunity. I also think the climate's the most liveable anywhere, I'm not kidding. Of Africa, and Kenya in particular? There are only fond memories for me. I miss having chauffeurs, servants & gardeners terribly. Oh, I can go on and on. What can I say, I grew up there, I love the place, still call it home.

PETER: *Did you get to see the wild animals?*

TED: Yes, very often, actually. I remember when I first got my drivers license at *15* (I lied to the inspectors). Most of my friends from school would converge on every weekend at various hotel lobbies around town, just bumming out. I would take my father's car and off I would go to the 'National Game Parks' (large natural game reserves) just to hang out with the animals. You can visit all the zoos in the world, but there's still no comparison with the feelings you get from being there, in complete wilderness surrounded by animals in their natural habitats. By the way, Tarzan wouldn't last half a day in there. I was always looking out for opportunity to go on Safaris. One that I got to do rather frequently was acting as a non-official tour-guide for the numerous Thai delegations that came to Kenya for the U.N.E.P. (United Nations Environmental Program) conference. My father, who was the assistant Trade Commissioner to Kenya at the time, was normally the official guide. See why I miss living there so much? It was a lot of fun! Back to comics.

PETER: *Yes, I was about to wonder whether Dave Kraft was paying you enough to keep you in this accustomed lifestyle. (Laughter.)*

DAVID ANTHONY KRAFT: *No problem.*

TED: My first encounter with comic books, at least the one that made any kind of impression on me, was two pages torn out of a Marvel book that my father had saved. My parents used to collect useful articles and artwork from everywhere. I'm talking 20 years ago, I must've been 6 or 7 years old. When I saw those pages my mouth just wouldn't close. They were of the 'Thing' battling some subterranean creatures, bashing cars & buildings all over the place. I thought, "Wow!" Of course I'd no idea it was the Thing of FF fame, until almost ten years later and already living in Africa. I can't recall what I did with the pages. Since I couldn't read in English at the time I suppose I must have lost interest in them, soon after. Anyway, it was while living in Kenya that I happened upon a concessionary store. And to my amazement and joy, there among oh, two dozen other comics was . . . The Thing! That's when I began to really discover and read comic books. My favorites were: MODESTY BLAISE; DAN DARE; and every book ever drawn by **John Buscema.** He's one of the best the medium has ever known, as far as I'm concerned. Of course there are Al

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"Most of the guys thought I was gay."

Williamson and **Hal Foster** who are favorites of mine, too. I had a decent collection until I left Kenya. Just sort of gave them all away. I had no idea they had any investment value, until I attended my first comic convention, the Atlanta Fantasy Fair. That was an eye opener, it was. I'd never seen so many comic books in my life. I literally went through that part of my life assuming that since kids read comics, kids draw comics. Isn't that silly? It's also the reason why I stopped reading them for a while. I was fifteen years old, way into my puberty if I may say so. I'm now interested in the different kinds of muscles other than the ones on Thor or Conan (you know what I mean?). And that's why I became a dancer. Where else could you find so many girls in one room! Most of the guys who didn't know me then automatically thought I was gay, so they never really cared much when I took their wives or girlfriends out. It was great.

Some of Ted's political satire.

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PETER: *And you were in high school at this point?*

TED: Yes. It was about midway through high school, actually, that I became involved in drama and theatrical arts. My younger brother, Nat, was the one who started it all. He auditioned for a part in the musical "Godspell" and got it. I went with him to one of the rehearsals and was invited to join the show. They couldn't keep me out, after that. I did twelve shows, mainly musicals, with the Kenya National Theatre. I have two younger brothers, and we've all been in a couple of shows together. I suppose it's in the blood, as some might say. Both my parents are very artistic. My father, who has since passed away, was an illustrator and a damn good one, before he became a diplomat for simple economic reasons. My mother, a beautiful lady, is an illustrator in her own right. Also sang and danced (Thai classical dancing) in her younger days. Up until 1977, I was probably the only male ballet dancer in East Africa. My brothers and I were the only oriental actors to ever graze the Kenya National Theatre's stage, which was soley run by the British. As you know, Kenya was a British colony.

PETER: *What kind of parts did you get?*

TED: Oh, a great variety. But mainly as lead dancer because I was the only professionally trained one. Come to think of it, and this is really ironic, but I have not done a single oriental role, the whole time that I was with the K.N.T.

PETER: *Did you ever get to do any straight dramatic role?*

TED: Yes, my first and only dramatic role, unfortunately was in an off-Broadway play, in New York City. The play was called "The Prisoners of Quai-Dong," based on a novel . . . about the Vietnam War. I played a Vietcong prisoner, under interrogation. It was a typically heavy kind of play and very exhausting to do because of the subject matter. Got us a decent review in the New York Times. You know, I didn't even audition for the show, at least not intentionally. You see, I was attending a commercial arts course at the time. The college is housed on the second floor of a wonderful New York landmark, the Ansonia Hotel, on 73rd & Broadway. The AMDA studio (American Dramatic Arts studio), which staged the play, is on the first floor. It was right after my voice class, which was on the fourteenth floor (I studied voice for classical and opera for a while, usually right after I'd get off from my commercial arts class.) I decided a cup of something warm would be good for my

throat. So I descended down to the ground floor to the coffee shop. It was there, while minding my own business that I was approached by the director of the play. It didn't take much for me to say, "sure."

PETER: *But you had gotten interested in art again, it seems, because you were taking these commercial art classes.*

TED: Yes, back in Africa I was heavily into oil and water color painting, mainly of wild life, for obvious reasons. But you can't make a living doing that in the fast-paced life style of New York. I don't think so.

PETER: *Do you find a connection between a comic book and having this background in commercial and the dramatic arts? Does it help in any way?*

TED: It depends on the type of stories the individual artist enjoys drawing. If he or she prefers to draw nothing but futuristic fantasy type stories, then I do not think it's necessary to have that background. But I, in particular, enjoy doing the type of stories that can easily be related to, in terms of characterizations and the treatment of locales. And I think that's very important today, because readers are far more sophisticated than they were a few years ago. At least I'd like to think so. As a commercial artist I'm forced to constantly be aware of the many current trends, and it covers many facets of our lives. It has a very broad meaning. What I'm really trying to say is, trends and styles change, so you and I, as artists, should be up to

"I was threatening to jump off the

date, so your work will never be boring to the readers. As an actor, you have what I can only describe as an open-book to human emotions. But there are some artists who can handle that splendidly without being actors. But I think it's a plus. I studied anatomy drawing largely on my own. But acting and dancing gives me an awareness as to what people really do with their anatomies. To tell you the truth, I have mentally acted out this story, "MICRA," that I'm working on, the whole thing.

PETER: *Does it also help you with designing the layout of a panel? Do you find yourself, in a sense, staging it?*

TED: Most definitely. Although I must add that **Lamar Waldron** plays a very important role in helping with the overall panel layouts. He by far is the more experienced person, in the field of comics. And has been a wonderful guiding force to me, and a good friend.

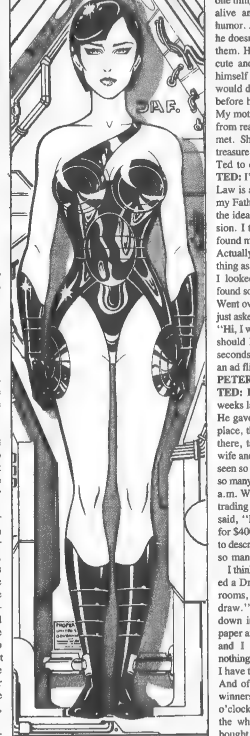
PETER: *So here you are, we've got you in New York taking commercial art and performing in plays. What happened next?*

TED: Well . . .

BILL CHADWICK: *Where did your wife Kami come from?*

PETER: *Yes, where did this lady sitting next to you come from?*

TED: We met in New York, in a Thai restaurant in Queens. *(Laughter.)* I was having dinner with a close pal, by the name of Duke. Duke's from Thailand, like me. We often spend time together, because we have a great deal in common. We both love women. Then, in walked these two very lovely oriental girls, who passed us by to sit somewhere in the back of the restaurant. Duke, possessing some primeval instinct (he's definitely better than me at this) went to work instantly. Before long we were having coffee at their table. Kami was born in Taiwan, lives in Atlanta and was in N.Y. visiting her friend. To make a short story even shorter, Duke and I both decided that Kami was the better of the two, so we sort of wrote her girlfriend off so we can concentrate on her. Duke asked her out and she turned him down. Then, I asked her out and she accepted, and the rest is history. (The truth is, I was on the floor threatening to jump off the Brooklyn Bridge if she didn't go out with me.) We put up with the frustrations of a long distance romance for four years. She flew up to New York quite frequently to see me. But me? No way, I'm not going to waste my time down Georgia, there can't be anything worthwhile to do down there but hum Dixie, so I thought. I finally succumbed, this was over four years ago, and I haven't left since.



From MICRA #1.

KAMI BOONTHANAKIT: During the four years that we were dating apart, the one thing that really kept our relationship alive and refreshing was his sense of humor. And it's all in his letters. You see, he doesn't write his letters, he illustrates them. He would draw all sorts of funny, cute and crazy characters, representing himself doing things. And very often he would do them in comic book form way before he ever thought of doing comics. My mother, she fell in love with him just from reading his letters, even before they met. She was the one who told me to treasure them, and always asked me to tell Ted to come down to Atlanta.

TED: I've always known my Mother-in-Law is a classy lady. By the way, it was my Father-in-Law who first gave birth to the idea of me doing comics as a profession. I took his advice, and that's how I found myself at the Atlanta Fantasy Fair. Actually, I had no idea there was such thing as a convention, when I started out. I looked up in the Yellow Pages, and found some listings for comic book stores. Went over to one on Buford Highway and just asked the poor guy behind the counter, "Hi, I want to be a comic book artist, what should I do?" He studied me for a few seconds and without a word, handed me an ad flier for the upcoming convention.

PETER: *How not to break into comics.*

TED: But it just so happened that two weeks later was the Atlanta Fantasy Fair. He gave me a flier and said, "Go to this place, there will be a lot of professionals there, talk to them." And we went, my wife and I, and I was *stunned*. I had never seen so many comic books in my life, and so many people. We went at 10:00 o'clock a.m. What surprised me was some adults trading comic books, and I saw those and said, "I *had* those books, they're selling for $400!" And of course I had no words to describe what was going on, there were so many books.

I think it was about 11:30 they announced a Draw-Off competition in one of the rooms, and she just said, "Go in and draw." So I went in, they made me sit down in this place, gave me a piece of paper and a pencil and said draw. I drew, and I said, "Let's go home, there's nothing more we can do." She said, "No, I have to go to work." She left me there. And of course they didn't announce the winners of the Draw-Off until 9:00 o'clock in the evening, so I had to spend the whole day there reading comics. I bought a few comics and I made friends with some kids, and they announced my name as a winner in the senior division. I won first place! I was shocked, surprised. Two weeks after that **Lamar Waldron**

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Brooklyn Bridge if she didn't go with me."

"My brothers and I were the only oriental actors at Kenya National Theatre."

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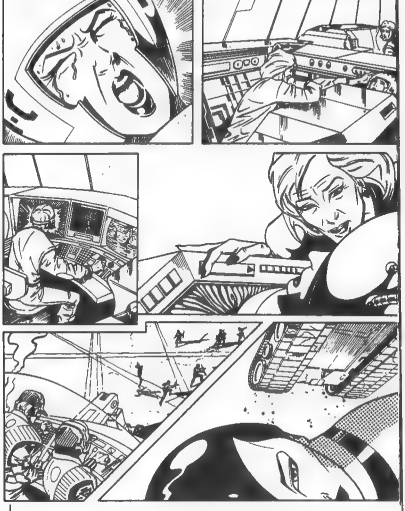

Ted's second MICRA sample for WaRP, before COMICS INTERVIEW.

wrote me a letter, wanted to meet me, and the rest is history. We just talked and talked and talked. I asked every question that I could about the industry.

PETER: *What year is this?*

TED: It was four years ago, I think. But we did miss a year. I went back to New York for a year and we lost touch, and then I came back and called him up. Nothing really happened for my career in the comics. I then began to start my commercial art career seriously. Then Lamar approached me with a MICRA script. It was originally being illustrated by another artist and I think Susan brought it up to New York but was rejected, so then he suggested that I try a few pages of it. I *loved* the story when I read it.

PETER: *So this is now two years ago.*

TED: Yes.

PETER: *And I suppose you had been working, practicing doing comics in the meantime.*

TED: In the meantime, yes; well, with Lamar's help, really. He pointed out to me the titles that I should start buying so I could learn from them. I don't think of myself so much as a *good* artist, but rather as a problem solver, a quick learner. I correct my mistakes easily. That comes from having worked in the commercial field. The deadlines are as deadly as comics, but they do expect you to change things instantly, over night, otherwise you don't get paid.

PETER: *Are you still working in commercial art now?*

TED: Yes, I do.

PETER: *What kind of things do you do?*

TED: Right now I'm mainly doing storyboards and comps and some illustration, but I also have been involved in productions, and I do graphic designs. Obviously everyone who is a commercial artist in Atlanta works for Coca-Cola, they are one of our biggest clients. I work for a graphic studio. We are sort of a subcontractor from the agency, the agency sends us work. And I do my free-lance stuff.

PETER: *Do you see yourself continuing to do both comics and commercial art, or do you want to become a full-time comic artist?*

TED: For as long as it's physically possible and financially satisfying. Comic books are something that I see happening for me in the future. I would like it to be a full-time thing if it could get to be satisfying in both, you know, the time and financial. I *love* the story that I'm doing right now. That does not necessarily mean that I will enjoy *every* comic book. Maybe I shouldn't say this, but I've gotten to be choosey at a very early stage. That may be because I'm spoiled by the kind of story that I'm doing, and the kind of artistic freedom that I get from working with **David Kraft.** I don't know if I would get that kind of freedom working for another company.

PETER: *Have you tried to get into the other companies?*

TED: No. We had approached WaRP Graphics prior to COMICS INTERVIEW, but before the contract was even signed, there were already hints of restrictions so we walked away from that. I have no thought to the future, as far as comics are concerned. What ever will be will be.

PETER: *In designing the characters for MICRA do you have particular things that you are trying to convey, from the way you draw the characters, what you make them look like? Do you have, say, specific models in mind?*

TED: No. The reason for MICRA's current look? I'm trying to over-emphasize that she's a lady, yes, a duplicate of the girl who is paralyzed, but she's a heroine, she's a *defender* of the domed city that is in the story. I try to portray a sort of a knightlike armor and at the same time make it feminine. I love drawing women. I had done some fashion illustration, and I think that helped.

PETER: *Does your wife's involvement with the fashion industry also help you become aware of, as you say, contemporary trends?*

TED: Very much so. She critiques my fashions in the books. She will tell me things like, "That's out of style and that's ugly; this is wrong; it wouldn't work; that's not practical." And of course I'm

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I get from working with David Kraft."

"He doesn't write his letters, he *illustrates* them."

HELLO THERE PRINCESS !! GUESS WHO?
WHO ELSE— BUT THE ONE AND ONLY— ORIGINAL ME !!
DO TELL ME OF YOUR HEALTH KAMI
I AM CONCERN
EEK! AAAT!!
MENSAHIB, I'M WRITING THIS LETTER AT 4:00 A.M.
BE COOL, MAAN! I'M ONLY GONNA EAT YOU UP!
WOW!!
I JUST COULDN'T SLEEP! YES I WAS THINKING OF YOU!
HMM
SO I FIGURES THAT THIS IS PROBABLY THE BEST THING TO DO. CAN YOU THINK OF ANYTHING BETTER?
HELP!
HOW'S THE WEATHER DOWN IN GEORGIA? IT'S GETTING VERY NICE HERE IN NEW YORK!
OH, BY THE WAY, I SHOULD BE RECIEVING YOUR SCHOOL CATALOGUES BY MAIL TODAY!
OOH, DARN THE FIG LEAF!
DON'T WORRY CHILD— LEAVES DON'T STAND A CHANCE AGAINST PHOTONS!
SO, HAVE NO FEAR— YOU WANT THE BEST? YOU'LL GET THE B— OUCH!!
HE HE HE!
TOK TOKA TOKA TOKA! TOK!
WHICH MEANS THAT I MUST TAKE MY LEAVE— THE SUN IS COMING UP! IT'S TIME FOR ME TO SHLEEP!
RAH— I MUST LET YOU KNOW, THAT THIS LETTER HAS TAKEN ME INTO IT'S THIRD HOUR, ALREADY
SO— UNTIL NEXT TIME... FAREWELL MY PRINCESS!
LOVE
Signature
YA-AGH!

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OR DESTROY IT!
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WEAPON EVER CREATED...
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"I'm influenced by Kami's fashions."

VITAL STATISTICS

Name: Ted Boonthanakit
Born: Bangkok, Thailand, 18 December 1956
Occupation: Illustrator, Former Actor/Dancer/Singer
Credits: Artist on MICRA
Favorite Movies: GONE WITH THE WIND; THE WAY WE WERE; THE TEN COMMANDMENTS; LOVE AFFAIR

Favorite Comics Past or Present: MICRA; the early AVENGERS and just about everything done by John Buscema; Burne Hogarth TARZAN; Moebius, I've read almost every one of his books; MODESTY BLAISE; especially RICHIE RICH

Favorite Pop Song: "My Way"

Favorite Opera: LA BOHEME; MADAME BUTTERFLY; DIE FLEIDERMAUS (operetta)

Favorite Pastime: I like to spend time with my wife; exercise

Favorite Book: THE BIBLE & THE FOUNTAINHEAD.

Favorite Role Has Played: A German dancer in CABARET, because I got to womanize and drink a lot

The would-be splash for the second 14-page MICRA installment, had WaRP published it.

influenced by some of the fashions that she has in her store. That's basically how I go about creating the fashion.

PETER: *How would you describe the process of collaborating with Lamar?*

TED: It's a lot of fun. Lamar and I think very much alike. I don't know much about the industry, I don't claim to know even a little at this point, but I know that Lamar knows a great deal of the industry. He's been involved with comic books for over 20 years, I think perhaps longer than many people who are actually working in the industry, presently.

PETER: *As a fan, as —*

TED: As a fan and as a writer, yes. And he has come in contact with many professionals in the field, who obviously spilled their *guts* to him many times. I trust his opinions entirely.

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"Some years I've done more theatre work

than Marvel work, and vice versa."

BOB HALL

Bob Hall is one of the comicdom's best kept secrets... until now. As the just-released EMPEROR DOOM graphic novel from Marvel and this interview will reveal, Bob is an incredibly versatile artist and an articulate man of many talents whose interests range from comics to the theater and beyond. In fact, it has been his interests in so many different areas that keeps drawing him a way from comics. Yet even though he "disappears" for months or years at a time, Bob always returns to comics. And despite his low profile, Hall has made his mark. On one of those earlier sojourns, he served a stint as an editor at Marvel. Another of those previous visits saw him drawing the SQUADRON SURPEME limited series. With this latest return, Bob is working on a series of PSI FORCE stories. Why exactly does he return to comics, only to leave them again? Inquiring minds want to know...

DWIGHT JON ZIMMERMAN: *Bob, right now you're working on a variety of projects for Marvel?*

BOB: Yeah. SPIDER-MAN covers; PSI FORCE — I'll be doing two issues and they're talking about me doing the annual; and an AVENGERS, "The Story of Jarvis," the history of the Avengers as seen through the eyes of Jarvis.

DWIGHT: *One of the things I've noticed is you seem to work for comics — more specifically, Marvel — for a set period of time and then you disappear, then you come back, then you disappear, then you come back.*

BOB: I tend to run in projects. I can juggle, for instance, directing a play and working for Marvel — most of what I've done in the theater has been directing. But as I get into a more heavy-duty project — like a play that I've written or something that takes me out of town, or I'll rarely act in something — then I have to shut down one system and really put my concentration and focus into one or the other. This year when I did the AVENGERS graphic novel I did nothing *but* the graphic novel for that length of time because, again, it felt like something I wanted to just concentrate on and ink myself and do all that, so I did absolutely no theater work while I was doing the novel.

DWIGHT: *You worked on a limited series for Marvel, too.*

BOB: WEST COAST AVENGERS, the first one, and then SQUADRON SUPREME.

DWIGHT: *How was that whole process for you?*

BOB: Well, the WEST COAST AVENGERS was about perfect. That was

VITAL STATISTICS

Name: Bob Hall
Born: 16 October 1944 — Lincoln, Nebraska
Occupation: Director, Artist, Writer
Education: BFA and MA from the University of Nebraska, worked toward a PhD at the University of Iowa.
Theater Credits: The best credit I've had is THE PASSION OF DRACULA. I've worked with a lot of the classics. It's an ongoing process. Part of what's fun about doing the classics is that you don't do them once and it's over with. People do the great roles, the great plays, over and over, and you don't do them the same but you always carry elements of them over into other work.

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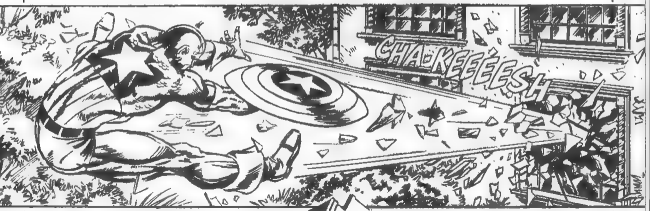
"WEST COAST AVENGERS was about perfect."



From the WEST COAST AVENGERS annual, pencilled by Bob, inked by Keith Williams and written by David Michelinie. Dr. Doom takes over the world — and nobody cares!

© 1987 MCG

a four-issue series, just about the size of a project I like to do for Marvel. Basically, the SQUADRON SUPREME just wore me down. More and more characters kept getting added to the series and eventually I did about half the series alternately, intermittently, and other people came in and worked on it, as well. It was the *most* running characters I've ever had to do and, eventually, I came to feel that I was mainly juggling characters and trying to figure out how do I get all of this arranged in one story. It became like a puzzle — how do I fit all of these people in without going to a lot of little panels with ants crawling around? *(Laughter.)* It was an interesting problem to work on, but also I found it very exhausting. It was a real difficulty. I would lay out, say, six pages, and then it would be very clear, "No, no — I've tried to get it all in by taking up too much room for the action. It's gotta be compressed back." So I'd go back and cut it back to three, and I would go that way through the book. I didn't want to jump-cut the story, nonetheless, and I didn't want to have it all be long shots. That kind of compression is much more demanding on the layouts, because most of the time I think you have a little more leeway.

I think generally when the artist gets a chance to do something that interests him is when the writer actually is leaving you maybe a page — and not that many writers do this — if you have a page or a page-and-a-half in a 21-, 22-page book, that means that there's anywhere between four to let's say nine panels throughout the issue that you can deal with. You can decide, "Hey, this action should take up a *whole* page," and you get to make some visual decisions that I think really make a difference in the book, even if it's something as small as saying, "I really think this is an important speech and so I *could* show a face shot for three panels." I think if you have that leeway that those are the books that you enjoy doing the most. I've always enjoyed, for instance, working with — and there are others, too — working with Roger for that reason.

DWIGHT: *Roger Stern?*

BOB: Yeah. I've always felt that Roger has one of the best senses — when he says this will fit in a book, for the most part, he really means it. It *will* fit into the book and it'll fit rather *nicely* into the book. One of the nicer things a writer can do for an artist is to give that feeling.

DWIGHT: *You mentioned your theater work, your directing. Do you spend a lot of your time with theater?*

BOB: I keep jumpin' around. I'm doing a lot of theater work. I really came to New York to be in the theater — that's what I'm trained to do — and have never stopped doing it. Somes years I've done more theater work than Marvel work, sometimes vice versa, sometimes in the middle, but I've never actually stopped either one of them since I came here. At one time, I had actually thought of going into academic theater, for which, for some reason, God knows why, you need a PhD — even if what you're pursuing is the artistic side of it. But at some point I decided that was absurd and didn't continue. There are a lot of things that have opened up now where MFAs are considered okay for the artistic end of academic theater.

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BOB HALL

"I co-authored PASSION OF DRACULA."

It always seemed a little bit of a silly field to me.

I've always wanted to be a director. I acted in about 50 plays, until I was about 25. I went out and did summer stock every year and all of this stuff. And then I've directed, I don't know how many, probably about 60 or 65 plays. A lot of **Shakespeare**, lots of **Shaw** — I love **Shaw**. I really *love* doing the classics for some reason, and I've done quite a few new plays. I've always been primarily a director. I ran a children's theater in Omaha to make enough money to come to New York. I'm an associated director of a place called CSC — repertory here in town — and I've worked a lot with a place called the Georgia Tree Playhouse out in New Brunswick, New Jersey; People's Light and Theater Company. I think I got the job by drawing the art director a Silver Surfer for his son *(laughter)*; a place called the Boar's Head in Lansing, Michigan, I've been a resident at several times; and I've worked around lots of other places doing one show here, one show there; guest artist at Cornell and the University of Virginia.

DWIGHT: *I remember, when I first met you, you were both an editor and working on PASSION OF DRACULA. You were — what? — the producer or director of that?*

BOB: No, I was the writer. I co-authored it and co-produced it.

DWIGHT: *This was at the same time that Frank Langella was doing the Broadway DRACULA.*

BOB: Yeah. Two groups of people got about the same idea at the same time, which I find happens more and more. It's like the idea for E.T. and the idea for STARMAN developing independently. It's actually surprising it doesn't happen more. With the current level of mass communications — TV, computers, electronics — all of the input comes in so fast that it's not surprising that people in different parts of the country doing various things, they say "A-ha, the time is right for this!" and proceed to do it and find out that other people have had the same idea and then they're fighting head on. That's sort of what happened with that project. We both ran for about two years. We ran off-Broadway at the Cherry Lane Theater and they ran uptown at the Martin-Veck. Then we opened simultaneously in London. *(Laughter.)* We had a longer run there. The only place I think we lost out was ours was one of the first plays done for Showtime — but they made a movie of theirs. The Showtime thing stunk. I've since directed it in San Francisco and Bermuda and Cornell University and other places.

DWIGHT: *Boy, you really shopped around.*

BOB: Yeah. Well, we still get royalties from it. It's being done, I think, in Atlanta this year. It's been done in Tokyo twice. It's interesting how it works. They've even talked about reviving it in New York — it's been almost ten years now — and bringing it back. There were three of us who produced it, my co-author **David Richmond** and a guy named **Eric Krebbs**, and Eric now runs two off-Broadway theaters in New York, the Douglas Fairbanks and the John Housman, and he keeps saying, "Why

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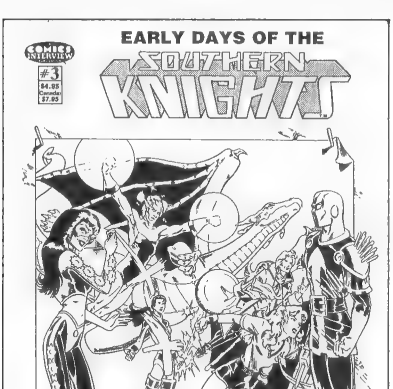

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"I've written a version of FRANKENSTEIN."

don't we bring it back for six weeks either side of Halloween?'' But, in the meantime, **David Richmond** and I have written a version of FRANKENSTEIN, which we swore we'd never get into that again — but then somebody commissioned us. They got to do the play and we ended up with the rights to the script and have been looking for a bigger place to do it now. It was just done by a theater for the deaf in Cleveland, all done in sign language, the Fairmont Theater for the Deaf.

DWIGHT: *The FRANKENSTEIN play?*

BOB: Right, a stage presentation done by deaf actors. They sign and somebody dubs them so that the hearing audience can understand what's going go.

DWIGHT: *Wow!*

BOB: It's fascinating. I just came back from there. It was an absolutely amazing experience.

DWIGHT: *What was the audience response to this?*

BOB: It was *very* good, although there's things you don't think about, like it ran a little bit longer than it should have. I mean, you never think about this, but if you're a playwright you write lines to cover action — unlike films where you're covering it with music or just intercutting — you try to keep some dialogue going while the action occurs. In a theater for the deaf all of the lines have to occur either before or after the action because you're using your *hands* to talk. You can't sign if you're using your hands for something else. The hearing audience, I think, would say, ''Hm, that's a little long,'' whereas the deaf audience would understand perfectly well what was going on and it was okay for them.

DWIGHT: *Did the actors have to be more expressive in their movements?*

BOB: Well, it's another language and they are more expressive, because a phrase like ''I love you'' will be signed exactly the same way every time. It's fascinating to watch. It's really like watching a great mime or dance, which is a much more abstract visual language. A reading of the play is going to be done by the Royal Shakespeare Company at the end of November —

DWIGHT: *Whoa!*

BOB: It's part of a sort of new works/young audiences festival.

DWIGHT: *How many deaf plays have been done, things specifically geared like yours?*

BOB: It's really hard to say, because things are constantly being translated into American sign language.

DWIGHT: *But this thing was actually created —*

BOB: No, in fact, it's written as a regular play and we hope it'll get done in New York. They were looking for a FRANKENSTEIN. They thought it was a good subject matter for deaf actors. You have to commission a translation into... it's kind of pidgin English that approximates the word order of American sign language, which is a different word order than English even though it uses English words as a base. The word order is based on what's the easiest to communicate in sign. Then they can perform it but, even at that, a lot of rehearsal was spent with the actors, once it had been translated, deciding what was exactly the right sign to be equivalent.

I'm still not clear on this, but apparently there's a slightly different thought process — especially for profoundly deaf people — there's a slighty *different* mode of thinking that goes on, and American sign is very *rich* but there are certain approximations, just like there's a verb tense in Russian that we've never heard of, somebody told me. There are concepts in deaf language that we don't have and vice versa, there are certain of our concepts that deaf people probably never quite relate to. It was a fascinating experience. I'd love to go back and start with the idea of almost using the ''Marvel method'' — we talked about this, I'm hoping maybe they'll look for a grant for this — where you go in with a scenario, work out the scenes with the deaf people in it improvisationalizing what they were signing, then work from that back into the language and eventually translate it into English for the hearing part of the audience; but start as if you were doing a Marvel plot, which I think would be a maybe more profitable way for them

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"I walked into the office and Shooter

to work. It would be starting with their concepts.

DWIGHT: *And at least you're familiar with that idea. Were all of the actors deaf?*

BOB: Most of them were. There were two hearing actors out of eight. The rest were all deaf and, of course, there were other hearing actors that dubbed it. They'd stand to one side.

DWIGHT: *The Greek chorus.*

BOB: Yeah, right. They have to be hearing. The deaf actors are amazingly expressive. I was very surprised to have gotten involved with it. I had no intention of having this done. For the first production to be in sign language is sort of amazing. It's like the production of DRACULA in the Japanese version; I'm sitting there and I can't really understand what's going on although, in a way, I can appreciate it — but I wish I understood the nuances more. So now that I've had that experience I would like to work with them again. It was vaguely like being in another country where you didn't speak the language, and yet usually when you're in another country you're not working that closely with these people — and some lovely people. It was very frustrating that you wanted to be able to talk with them. So now I'm determined to learn sign.

DWIGHT: *But at least you could take a pen and scratch it out and hand it to 'em.*

BOB: Yeah, right, although, boy, it's amazing, you try to do that, it's amazing how much you *depend* on your eyes and your hands when you're speaking to communicate concepts.

DWIGHT: *The work you do in the theater and the work in comics, have the two disciplines aided you a lot, or not really affected how you produce your stories?*

BOB: I feel I started working for Marvel basically because of **John Buscema.** He was teaching his course in how to draw comics, which I think he did for two years — although the first year was kinda fun because he stuck in a lot more classes than he really should have for the money everybody was paying. He wasn't quite sure how to set it up, and he finally figured out how to set it up the second year and now that he figured that out, he's not doing it — but he had it for one year where you went twice a week for nine months to a suite in the Americana Hotel where John personally taught a class for three hours a night. It really was terrific. **Bruce Patterson** was in it, and **Jose Ortiz** was in the class. But I had an advantage because I was older and — I'm always older than anybody else — I'd been sort of self-trained as an artist in some odd ways. I'd studied scene design. I put myself through college doing posters for the theater department and the student union and various things like that. Now this doesn't mean that I was any good, but at least I had a bit more drawing skills than anybody else going in. The big thing was the theater background 'cause I knew how to tell a story, and it was very much as if somebody had let me do storyboards for a movie. Also I've studied — just because he should be mentioned — with a guy named **Don Stacy** who runs a painting studio here in New York, the Don Stacy Studio, and teaches drawing and painting through the New School, and then you can sign on to be part of his studio. I've been going there off and on for the last five years to draw the model and to get some input that's non-comic-book oriented into my work, which I think has been very valuable.

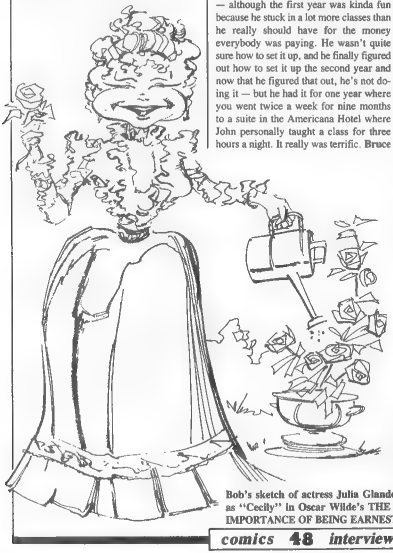
So, looking at it that way, I think the theater training helps. Basically a director is a storyteller, he's making a translation of dialogue; and, supposedly, I can read a script and see visual images, begin to have visual images as I read this dialogue. If I don't have those visual images, it probably means that it's not a play that I should direct, that's really how you make that choice, or one of the ways in which you make it — so that's not that different from being a comics artist, that translation of words into pictures.

I think there's certain aspects in having worked with actors that have helped me in terms of creating characters and character expressions and nuances of emotion and hands and stance and that kind of feeling.

Once I got past the initial phase, that is.

I think everybody in comics, in their first year, panics and says, "My God, how did anybody *ever* make these deadlines?" You swipe anything and everything that you can because, first of all, you can't figure out how the hell you're ever going to get it done and, secondly, you're always *convinced* you're going to bring this stuff in and somebody's going to say, "That isn't the house style. That isn't the way Marvel does it." I'm convinced there's sort of a *legend* of a house style that's grown up just by people convincing themselves that there *has* to be one and they'd better do it. *(Laughter.)*

After a few years as an artist, I think the theater stuff started to kick in and real-



Bob's sketch of actress Julia Glander as "Cecily" in Oscar Wilde's THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING EARNEST.

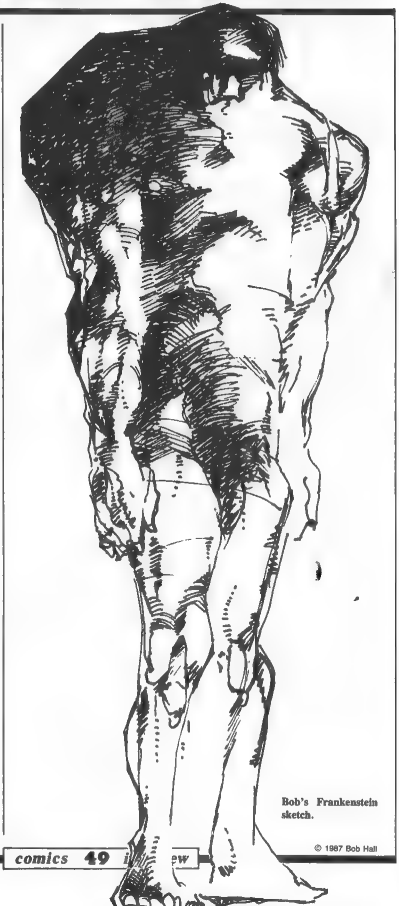
said 'Do you want to be an editor?'''

ly began to help. Within a sense these characters are all actors. In some ways it kind of hurt a couple of times. Every once in awhile I'll spot something in my work that's a composition that's more as if it were on a stage than, say, as if it were in a movie — and I think, for comics, the movie shot is more dynamic. Staging is a little static. But I think the influence of the theater on the comics has been greater than the other way around.

DWIGHT: *We don't have "comic-book style" staged theater settings.*

BOB: Well, now, this is not entirely true. I couldn't have written the purple passages in PASSION OF DRACULA without having had *some* exposure to **Stan Lee** and **Roy Thomas.** *(Laughter.)* And certainly in the sense that I would like to develop things from a scenario. I think there could be more influence than there is. In fact, what I'm working to do now is, I'm taking a theater space in town — it's a workshop space, not an actual theater — and I want to work towards starting a theater, which is something I've always wanted to do.

I was an editor for awhile. I walked into the office one day and **Jim Shooter** said, "Do you want to be an editor?" It was one of the few times in my life I had ever negotiated a contract properly — because I'm terrible at that sort of thing — but I honestly didn't want the job. Jim seemed convinced they needed an editor — they were expanding — and I had just written PASSION OF DRACULA, and Jim was convinced that somebody from outside bringing a different kind of thought other than just pure comic book or pure fan or whatever to it would be valuable. He may have been right, but it was the first and only time thus far that I've had an office job. Everything I've ever done in my life has been free-lance and has had a beginning and a middle and an end to it. I think that's why I'm so project-oriented in my comic-book work. It relates to the theater work. One reason theater work has always appealed to me is that you start it, you finish it, then you go on to something else. I'd never tried being in an office. My immediate reaction was "no." And Jim said, "Well, here's the salary." I said, "No, I really don't want to do it." And so he raised the amount. *(Laughter.)* So I said, "Well, I'll think about it." So he raised it one more time! I never asked for a raise and he just kept raising, and I realized this is how you negotiate. Of course, if I'd wanted the job, I would have said "yes" right away. "What would you like for money?" "No, no, fine — I'll work for nothing." So I



Bob's Frankenstein sketch.

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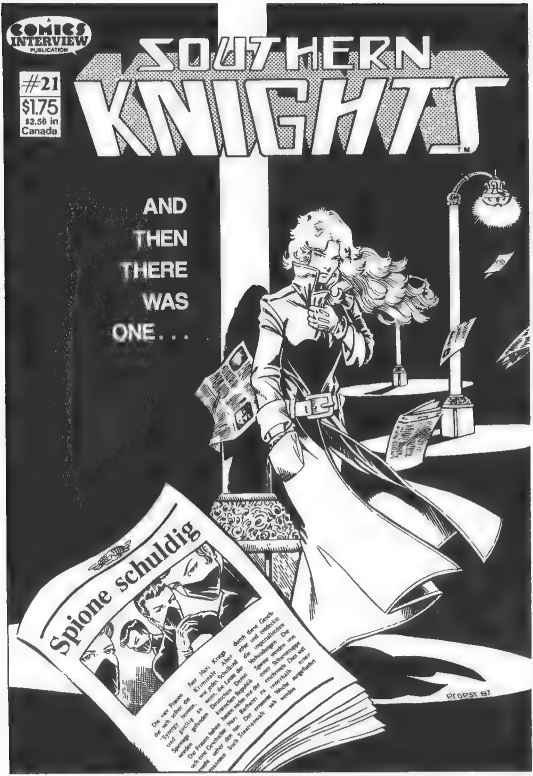

SOUTHERN KNIGHTS #21 **Behind the iron curtain, the Knights get into their new role as undercover superheroes! Don't miss this one!**

COMICS INTERVIEW PUBLICATION
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"But I went berserk after awhile."

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did it for, I think, about six months — and actually I think Jim was right about getting somebody from outside — but I went berserk after awhile

I wasn't throwing things or standing on tables, but I had never gone into an office every day . . . and decided I should not do this if I can avoid it, and so left being an editor. But I had a good time and learned a hell of a lot about the comic-book business and a sense of where it was going. Being an editor made me realize a lot of these other artists have the same fears that I do, the same problems. You begin to sense a certain community of freelancers and what this game is about, so it was very useful from that point of view — and I think it also was a little freeing because, all of a sudden, sitting in he editor's chair you didn't *want* everything to look so much alike. *(Pause.)* It's terrible to sit here and look at one of your own drawings for a long time and think, "Why did I make this thigh wider than that thigh?" Let's change places.

DWIGHT: *Bob is looking at his PETER PARKER cover on the wall for issue #125. He's looking at Spider-Woman spreadeagled as she dangles, you know, facing the Wrecking Crew.* (Changing places.) *You poor guy. Artists are always grumbling.*

BOB: I always want to run up with a magic marker and touch it up. I've done it to people. I've given away some of my drawings to friends and have gone into their houses and while they were out of the room I would go up and touch up the drawing. *(Laughter.)* So anyway, what I'm trying to do now, this year, I'm trying to get a theater started. I would love to do a lot of **Shakespeare.** We've got the place in New York where we can work on developing some plays but I'm looking for a place to actually start a theater where there would be community support — for a professional company — and where we could raise funds. I'm not sure that the city right now is the most economically feasible place, because of the amazing amount that real estate costs here. I would rather have a home base outside of New York and try to bring some things into the city — so if anybody has any great ideas, "My town would love a theater," or "This is the perfect place," or "There's this old opera house," or "My uncle has a barn," they should write me care of COMICS INTERVIEW and tell me. Or if they have $50,000 they've always wanted to put into a theater, I'm here and waiting. *(Laughter.)*

The thing I'd most like to do, of course, is FRANKENSTEIN, because I've been working on the script and I'd like to direct this one myself. I didn't direct the DRACULA one that was done in New York because, in essence, I was one of the producers. I realized I was going to try to direct myself out of stuff that *should* be rewritten; so it's one reason I'm going to do a slightly different process with this, a lot of readings in various places, so that I feel it's really worked out tightly enough so that I can direct it. I've also done a new translation with my wife of **Moliere's** THE MISANTHROPE. I speak no French. *(Laughter.)* She got it into a doggerel form so we could work on it, and I did it a few years back and have just rewritten it into a nicer version, and so I'd like to direct that as well.

Bob had to be restrained from touching up Spider-Woman's thigh.

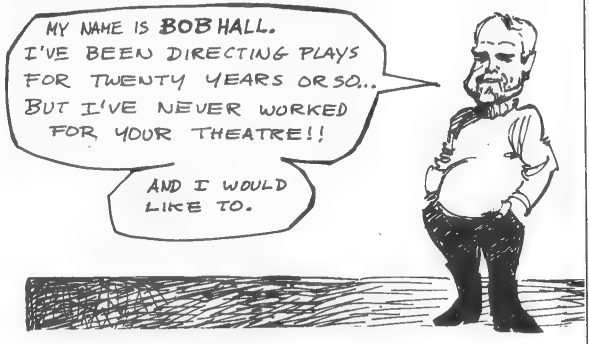
DWIGHT: *Since you tend to work for comics a little bit and leave and come back and so on, how have the comic books developed from the time you first came to them?*

BOB: Do you mean my comics — or comics on the whole?

DWIGHT: *Well, your observations of what's being produced.*

BOB: I think that, on the whole, there's more interesting stuff being done both by the independents and by the major com-

"Shooter made it possible for not-so-


MY NAME IS BOB HALL.
I'VE BEEN DIRECTING PLAYS FOR TWENTY YEARS OR SO..
BUT I'VE NEVER WORKED FOR YOUR THEATRE!!
AND I WOULD LIKE TO.
© 1997 Bob Hall

panies than since just before I got into comics. When I first started lookin' at comics was. . .I mean, I had been a comics fan when I was a kid and then, like a lot of other guys, I just stopped reading them when they sort of went into the doldrums. My age is just right for coinciding with all that happening. From the time I was 8 or 9, until the time I was 13 or 14, I really read a lot of comics. I would go to the Salvation Army store, which always seemed to have tons of comics — I mean people would go *nuts* now for these things — and they were *two cents* apiece! All you can get into a bag for basically, you know, a buck, and there were all of these CAPTAIN MARVELs from the '40s and all this sort of stuff still floating around — collectors hadn't found them yet — and so I had a great time. But then, about that time, the Comics Code came in and all of the comic-book companies started closing down and Captain Marvel was no more. DC and Dell were the only big games going, and so then I stopped reading comics and never looked at them again until I was in my late twenties.

Just before I was going to move to New York to be in the theater, somebody said, "Hey, look what's going on here," and gave me a batch of comics, and then I started buying some. **Berni Wrightson** was just about to start doing SWAMP THING but he was doing all of this stuff for DC — and just after I moved to New York **Kubert** started doing TARZAN, **Buscema** was doing FF and THOR, **Kirby** was doing NEW GODS, **Barry Smith** was doing CONAN, and **Neal Adams** was doing anything anybody could get him to do. The first comic I read in years was a **Barry Smith** CONAN followed by a **Neal Adams** BATMAN, and then at the same time **Neal Adams** was doing THE AVENGERS. All that was going on right then, gosh! Who else? I mean, there were just tons of terrific people creating an entirely new energy in the field. That died down for a while and we got stuck, I think, into a sort of pseudo-realism, and maybe there was kind of inadvertently a house style, particularly at Marvel; which certainly people were buying but nonetheless it became very clear, you know, hey, this guy does it really well and this guy is okay and this guy is terrible, you know.

DWIGHT: *But we need somebody right now to do something.*

BOB: Yeah, and it would all kind of fit together. Well, in fact, what was happening was that everybody was trying to draw this sort of pseudo-realistic style, even people who were much better than what they were doing. Not everybody. Some of them had the guts to do what it was they did, but a lot of those people burned out — a lot of the **Wrightsons** and the **Smiths** and so on for awhile were out of comics. When I first started, if you weren't super fast — forget it, you were clearly going to leave the field within a matter of a couple of years. Speed was everything. If you weren't a **Kirby** or a **Buscema** or a **John Byrne** you really couldn't make much of a living at it, because it was absoultely by the pound. The rates were not that high.

DWIGHT: *And there were no royalties.*

BOB: Yeah, exactly, and I think for whatever it's worth — and I was turned around at the same time — people are always back and forth about their opinions about **Jim Shooter**, but **Shooter** made a big difference to me in terms of my ability to work in comics, and I think a lot of other people's, in that he really came in and saw it as a business — but he also likes artists. I was around as an editor when a lot of this was happening, and he essentially seemed to have the theory of, "Hey, you know, if we pay people a lot of money, we'll get better work out of them." Not exactly old-time Catholicism — I mean, it should work in theory, but nobody was doing it. Jim made it possible for somebody who was a good artist, but not so fast, to stay in the business, and I think in spite of the fact of who started the first royalty program or who didn't or

fast good artists to stay in business."

whatever, he made a big difference in turning around a sense of what was happening with comics. People are now staying in the profession more, and so I think that's made a big difference; at the same time, a lot of what was happening artistically in the smaller companies then began to influence the big companies, and some people like **Simonson** came around, and **John Byrne,** who could have either gone towards . . . I mean there was a time when John drew **Neal Adams** bodies with these strange heads. *(Laughter.)* And suddenly John seemed to decide the heads were what's right, "That's what my style is," and he went more and more towards a cartoony style. There just became a lot more freedom. Things didn't have to have that pseudo-realistic feeling to them, and now there is just this amazing variety of people at work in the major companies, from a **Tom Palmer** who gives everything a photographic look to **Walt Simonson** who is just superb, but nobody would think of calling it realistic.

DWIGHT: *It's truly stylistic.*

BOB: Stylistic, yeah. Unrealistic, although I'm never even really sure about that. I think realism has become — rather than a description of a style, which is what it really perhaps should be — it's become a compliment or a feeling of approbation. You really have to take it with a grain of salt. A lot of fans will write in and say, "Hey, *so-and-so* is so realistic," and what they mean is this has an air of conviction, or that they believe this comic. It's not the style — they'll say it about Walt. I think they'd say it about **Carl Barks,** which was true — **Barks** was realistic in the sense of the soul of his work. It had a reality to it, a creation of reality, but it didn't look real.

DWIGHT: *Talking animals are real. Guys running around in their long johns and smashing through walls are real.*

BOB: Sure. So, you know, I think it'd be fun if fans abandoned the idea of realism — this is the most *realistic* depiction — and looked at what some amazing things people are doing with, you know . . . this guy uses line, this guy uses mass. There are different things at work. But it probably is just as well that it doesn't affect them that way and that they just look at it; but the amazing amount of style at work today is, I think, one of the more appealing things going in comics.

DWIGHT: *One of the big things that I noticed was that ten years ago, even up to, like, five years ago, superheroes had a total lock on the American comics industry.*

BOB: Right.

DWIGHT: *Unless it was a superhero, it couldn't exist. Now I'm seeing more and more other types of things. Have you seen MAUS?*

BOB: I haven't seen **Spiegelman's** MAUS. Everybody tells me about it and I keep meaning to pick it up.

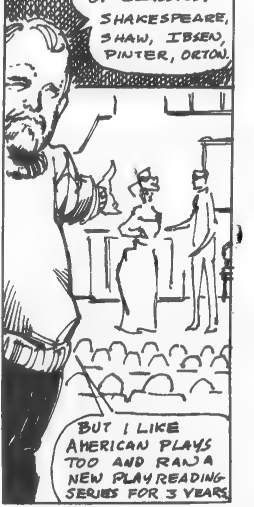
DWIGHT: *My wife was really impressed by it, thought it was an excellent story. I tend to view that all with a little bit of suspicion, because she has a definite European viewpoint of art, you know.*

BOB: Right.

DWIGHT: *It's been a running gag. If we go to a foreign film, if it's one she likes, I'll hate it. I definitely am an American in my tastes. There are a few foreign films that I did like but, boy, is that a few and far between thing.*

BOB: I haven't been exposed to a lot of foreign films. I'm beginning to like them more and more. I mean, I really come from, obviously, the Midwest; you have nothing but taste to outgrow. *(Laughter.)* The most American tastes in the world. It took me forever just to learn to eat rare steak. I was from real Irish stock.

DWIGHT: *Meat and potatoes.*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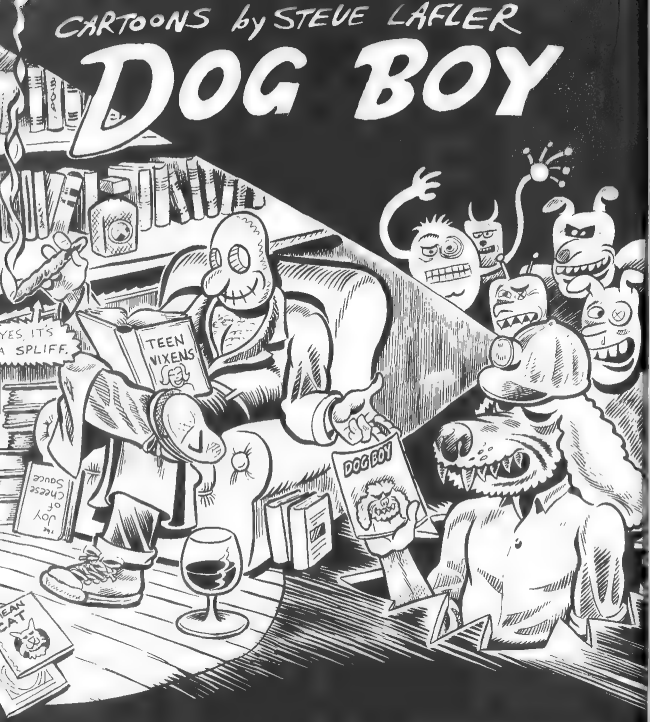

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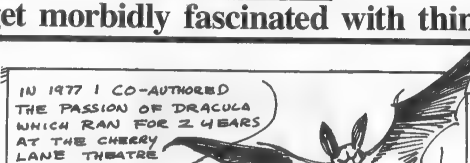
"I get morbidly fascinated with things."



BOB: Meat and potatoes and everything cooked within an inch of its life. But I do become more and more enamored of foreign films, just because of what's happening in Hollywood right now. It seems so damn unvital — is that a word? There is this "by committee" process, it seems — what do they call it, the high concept movie that's being done now? — if I ever see another movie about teenage guys wanting to see naked girls in their locker room and drilling holes in the walls, or coming of age in IOWA —

DWIGHT: *BREAKING AWAY was good.*
BOB: Once in a while somebody will do an excellent film, but that was a few years ago.

DWIGHT: *And that was an oddity, actually.*

BOB: Yes, it was, as was AMERICAN GRAFFITI, which really started the whole thing off. They were original and remarkable films. Then somebody obviously gets the idea of, "Let's do that but let's combine it with HALLOWEEN, combine it with ANIMAL HOUSE, but this is completely original because this isn't like HALLOWEEN combined with ANIMAL HOUSE combined with AMERICAN GRAFFITI, this is more as if you had AMERICAN GRAFFITI combined with ANIMAL HOUSE combined with . . ." And if all else fails — we'll sell it to cable.

The worst one, and the one that brings it even closer to us, because people keep saying it's *like* a comic book *(laughter)* is the extension of RAMBO where the hero

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I'M TOO RETICENT. I SHOULD GO TO MORE PARTIES, I SHOULD GET TO KNOW JOE PAPP.
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MAYBE IF I DRAW A CARTOON?
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BOB HALL
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"I saw DEATH WISH III last night."

blows everybody away. There are bad guys and they're really bad and the hero gets usually the biggest gun he can find and walks blithely down the street and blows all the bad guys to pieces. It used to be that there would at least be a conflict, you know. The hero would get beaten up once or something would happen that would really make you feel that at least he's going through adversity. Of course, I've got cable and I stay up late drawing, so I see every movie ever made, and they are slowly rotting my brain. You can say turn them off and watch the good stuff but, first of all, at 2:00 in the morning that isn't on and, second, this kind of stuff is the perfect thing for drawing comic books to, because you're sitting there drawing and you want just a little distraction at some point and the music tells you when you ought to look up, or the gunfire. *(Laughter.)* These are simple plots. I mean, what you want is a Republic Western. But now there is no plot. There is...

DWIGHT: *Pyrotechnics.*

BOB: Yeah. It's all these movies with whoever the interchangeable guy is standing there with his extended phallus with the bullets running through it and he blows everybody away. I saw DEATH WISH III last night... and I don't know why I get morbidly fascinated with these things — my wife said, "You know you wanted to turn it off but you couldn't stop watching it." I mean, it was the most despicable movie I have ever seen, the most immoral, sleazy — I watched every minute! *(Laughter.)* I did. Usually, something will distract me. This one, I was just glued to the set. I was saying, "They can't mean lines like that." It's like, "They're like roaches, you have to kill them all." *(Laughter.)* And eventually families in the neighborhood begin to kill the bad guys, too, and little kids come out and dance around the bodies. All of the time **Bronson** keeps talking about how this type of Magnum is even better than Dirty Harry's Magnum because this one contains a capsule that's like for hunting big game. It'll blow them away.

Anyway, that's the mentality that drives me the craziest, because people relate it to comic books. They say that's what comic books are about. I think it behooves us to make sure that *isn't* what comic books are about. I'm not talking about the violence. I'm talking about mindless, dopey plots, and we've all seen them. There have occasionally been comic books where a bad guy shows up and he's clearly bad and vile because he rapes three armored trucks and steals an old lady, you

Bob's costume sketch for the role of Sir George Croft in MRS. WARREN'S PROFESSION, by Bernard Shaw.

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"One whole side of my family is dwarves."

Captain America versus...*Conan*?!

know, and then Iron Man shows up and blows him away, and that is the plot. Well, that isn't really a story.

DWIGHT: *But, boy, think of the visuals that we can get out of this!*

BOB: Yeah, and strangely enough they are never that visually interesting — either. Very seldom will just the pure blow-away comic be all that visually interesting — to me, anyway. I think the more interesting ones are the ones that tell a story, that have sufficient story to tell. I think that's one of the wonderful things about **Frank Miller**'s stuff, is that he seems to have so much story to tell that it just kind of bubbles over. It has to spill over onto all those panels, *has* to have those extra little things thrown in to make it all happen.

DWIGHT: *You mentioned that you are from Nebraska. Is your wife from Nebraska, as well, or did you meet her here?*

BOB: No, she's from Springview, Nebraska, a little town of about 300 people out in the middle of the sand hills. There are sand dunes in northern Nebraska, only of course they're covered with sagebrush.

DWIGHT: *Well, she must have been incredibly tolerant to have been willing to leave — to be willing to go to the heart of the beast, you know, New York City.*

BOB: Oh, no. She says that the only appeal that I ever had, really, was that I clearly was going to go to New York City. That was one of my ambitions and she wanted to get out of the state a lot worse than I did. I mean, she had done everything there was to do in this little town by the time she was...I suppose you could find ZEN there, but she wasn't ready. *(Laughter.)* Nirvana awaits in Springview, Nebraska. And I was, you know, a big city boy. I was from Lincoln, 100,000 people, and it's gotten bigger now because we have a football team now. So we were both anxious to come someplace that wasn't as flat. *(Laughter.)* Although now, actually, when I go back to visit, I am amazed by the beauty of that much absolute-flat-as-a-pancake land.

DWIGHT: *The sky!*

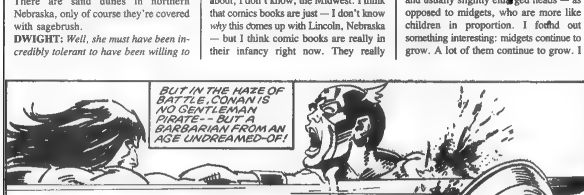
BOB: Yeah! Yeah! But I was pretty sick of it by the time I left. It would be very interesting to do some sort of a visual thing about, I don't know, the Midwest. I think that comics books are just — I don't know *why* this comes up with Lincoln, Nebraska — but I think comic books are really in their infancy right now. They really haven't been around that long. They're about equatable with what, TV. They've been around a little longer than TV.

DWIGHT: *Yeah, they really are contemporary.*

BOB: Except that even the grammer of TV came from film, I suppose, so maybe it's been around a little longer. But anyway, I still think there's room for, you know, honest-to-God non-genre novels; and I'm not *knocking* genre things, I love genre things — superheroes and whatever — but I think it would be a great medium just to tell a novel, just to tell a story of your family, whatever.

DWIGHT: *You mentioned one thing in the office a couple of weeks ago, that you have some rather unique relatives.*

BOB: Oh, the dwarves, yeah. I've always liked drawing dwarves because one whole side of my family is dwarves, one aunt and then her daughter and then...I think there's four generations of them. They're true dwarves — which have short arms and short legs and normal-sized torsos, and usually slightly enlarged heads — as opposed to midgets, who are more like children in proportion. I foe[illegible] out something interesting: midgets continue to grow. A lot of them continue to grow. I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X-THIEVES™ #5

by Henry Vogel & Mark Propst

COMICS INTERVIEW PUBLICATION

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"My cousin went with a midget wrestler."

mean, there's so many different kinds of midgetry and dwarfism, but in some midgets it's an extreme slowing of the growth and they continue to grow all their lives. I knew a midget in college who worked for the local PBS station — and I didn't see him for about 15 years and came back to visit and he was no longer a midget. He was a short adult. What had happened was he had gone through puberty. Whereas before he had been, like, 12 years old in his appearance — he was actually in his 40s — he had aged into an adult. Anyway, my relatives are actual dwarves. A short one's about three feet tall. Great people. Great people. But I've always loved sketching them, the way they move and walk, a very unique style — and I also admire them a great deal. They all get around remarkably well, but it's just fascinating to watch the compensations they make, the way they sit.

My cousin went with a midget wrestler for awhile and she wanted to be the world's first lady midget wrestler. *(Laughter.)* Her mother talked her out of it. Actually, they proclaimed her the world champion. There was no other lady midget wrestler — so, in a certain way, she was a champion for awhile — but my aunt, her mother, was always desperately afraid that another one would show up and she'd actually have to wrestle. Before that could happen she broke up with the wrestler, so it never came to anything. She's married now to another dwarf who's a DJ on the country-and-western station in Lincoln.

DWIGHT: *Do you go back home often?*

BOB: Yeah, about once a year. My mom's still out there, and two aunts. I don't come from a terribly large family. They are about it, so I go back about once a year to see them.

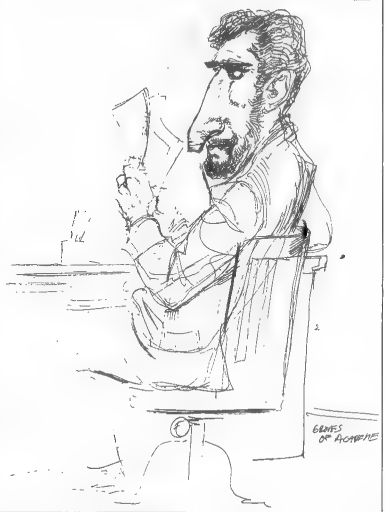
DWIGHT: *In the Bob Hall predicitions of himself for the next year or so, where would you like to be, go, do?*

BOB: My ideal situation would be that I would like to be artistic director of a theater. That's really what I've always wanted to do, and I realize that I'm getting to the age now where I should either do that or not do that. I would like to continue to work in comics, but what I'd like to do for awhile is run a theater and be able to direct more — this is what I'm putting my biggest efforts into — and work in comics on a project basis. I don't think I'd every really want to stop drawing at this point, but I would like to work more on projects I enjoy doing. The last graphic novel that I did, I'd like to do some more of those, and I'd like to *write* some things on my own as well. But I've never felt — I don't know why — I just never got into writing superhero comics. I have some things in the back of my mind, some projects to develop.

DWIGHT: *You've got a whole New Universe available to you here at Marvel.*

BOB: Well, I'm doing PSI FORCE, but I do tend to think that the New Universe is . . . I have trouble thinking of it as a new universe, I have to be blunt. I kind of like the Psi Force kids because they're non-super, although I'm not quite clear where they're going to develop. I'm curious what the future of the strip is. There's a lot of superheroes. I like doing superheroes, don't misunderstand me. My favorite to do are the Avengers. I like doing the Avengers the best, I don't know why. As characters, I've always loved them. I really like superheroes but I feel kind of sated with them in a way. I think some of the best work with superheroes is being done with . . . making some of the old favorites come to life. I'm not sure how many more people in long underwear the world needs, although I suppose if one thinks of a really . . . a truly original concept, it's great — but I think a lot of the concepts that come along are a little bit like those "high concept" Hollywood movies we were talking about where somebody says, "Wait a minute, this guy'll be different. He doesn't shoot lightning from his hands, he shoots it out of his eyes — and he doesn't live in New York, he lives in Hoboken." It's really a lot of the same old stuff.

How much new is there under the sun? The best writers put new wine in old bottles, whether that's taking an old character or taking an old concept — which if we talked about it, it would sound a little bit hackneyed — but they develop it terribly well so there's no faulting it either away. I think if I worked on something I would love to work on, if I were trying to write something from whole cloth, I would tend to want to work on a non-superhero idea.



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LAST WORD

Comics Interview 234 Fifth Ave. Suite 301 New York, NY 10001

COMICS INTERVIEW: THE INSIDE SCOOP!

Dear David,

I pick up COMICS INTERVIEW regularly and enjoy it a lot! Especially when your interviews are with interesting behind-the-scenes people like **Jerry Perles** in #43. I like reading about the early days of the comics industry and **Mr. Perles** sure had the inside scoop on it! One of the people he mentioned from the **Goodman** days was **Noah Sarlat** (incorrectly spelled as "Salat" in your mag). Noah has worked with just about every major publisher in America and is now big kahuna and main troubleshooter for us at CRACKED. We draw upon his expertisé for all kinds of situations and we couldn't ask for anyone better or more knowledgeable. Though he might be most well known for producing those rugged men's adventure mags of the '50s for Magazine Management (Marvel's old magazine division), he had working relationships with most comics publishers and has related loads of neat stories about **Martin Goodman, Stan Lee, Lev Gleason** and other dynamoes. There are a lot of not so well known people that got things rolling in comics and often they have much clearer insight than the big guns do! Thanks again and let's see more interviews like that.

Since you brought up **Sol Brodsky** a couple times in the interview and obviously have a great deal of respect for him, lemme ask you: Did you know that Sol was the main force behind the creation of CRACKED and edited the first 10 issues? CRACKED was initiated during the comics slump of the late 1950s and took advantage of some unbusy Atlas artists like **John Severin, Bill Everett, Joe Maneely, Russ Heath, Jack Kirby, Al Williamson** and tons of others. And, by the way, Sol's vision has persisted... we are celebrating our 30th anniversary this year and CRACKED is more popular than ever!

Keep up the good work!

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FANS ACROSS THE WATER

Dear David,

What a pleasant surprise to find COMICS INTERVIEW #42 whilst working in Edinburgh. With the current surfeit of material currently available, magazines like yours only make my shopping list when they've something special to offer (and even then they've got to overcome dodgy distribution over here before I can see them). So, spotting the **Frazetta** cover amongst the crowded shelves was that something special.

I've always thought of **Frazetta's** work as a purely emotional thing, causing gut-level reaction. I don't think I've ever considered any possible intellectual contact. My initial reaction to the interview was therefore to the accompanying illustrations. I'm afraid this was unfavorable on a number of counts:

The text of the interview was fairly informative. Any coverage of **Frazetta** nowadays is rare, and for a piece to reveal new information is a real bonus. The PLAYBOY episode (page 61), for example, is a completely different version of the story to the one I'd heard — that **Frazetta's** work was rejected as uncommercial when he was an unknown, and that once he'd become a SUPERSTAR artist was the first time **Hefner** showed interest (and hence all he got was the uninspired piece in PLAYBOY's September 1978 issue.) And as for Ace keeping his paintings (page 29) — I just hope **Groth** doesn't read this. Oh, sorry — Ace. Not Marvel. No possible interest to **Groth**.

There seems to be a lot of **Frazetta's** career that just doesn't get touched upon by interviews — what did he do between TALLY-HO COMICS in December 1944 and Standard mid-1947? I presume he must have kept working, but on what? Then there's his comic strip career. JOHNNY COMET and ACE McCOY in his own name, LI'L ABNER for **Al Capp**, which, lets face it, occupied some nine years of his life, as much as his comic

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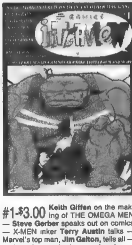

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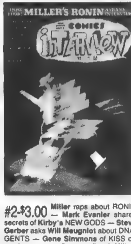

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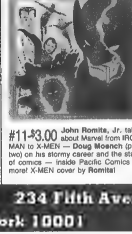

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book career in its entirety. His brief attempt at reviving his comic book career: inking **Evans** and **Crandall** for Dell, his work on "Werewolf" (CREEPY #1), the two "Loathsome Lore" pages, and that wonderful "Easy Way to A Tuff Surfboard" ad . . .unpublished comic strips — rejected by syndicates . . .

No. I enjoyed the interview. I've merely listed nagging little points which I feel prevent it being as good a piece as it should have been. The only thing which did upset me was the photo on page 64. My God! How he's aged!

Steve Ringgenberg, by way of a sudden change in subject, is someone about whom I knew nothing. I'd read a few COMICS JOURNAL interviews conducted by **S.C. Ringgenberg,** but had not made the connection. It's nice to think that someone shares my views on Messrs **Claremont** and **Miller** (amongst others) and unlike me is sufficiently eloquent to express those views. All it really cames down to to, I guess, (on the merits of the writers discussed) is whether you'd be embarrassed to find someone reading your comics over your shoulder on the bus. I wouldn't read any X-MEN book in those circumstances, for what people might think of me. **Moore's** SWAMP THING I'd be happy to read. I might even hand it to them to sample . . .

Once I'd returned from Edinburgh, I went round the local second hand bookshop. And what did I see? Why, my first ever **Vance Bourjaily** book (ASSASSINATION). Taking this to be an omen, I bought it. I shall be reading it shortly — so **Ringgenberg** had better be right.

Keep up the good work.
Correspondence invited, not expected.

Tim Barnes
103 Tredworth Road
Gloucester
England GLOS GL1 4QU

P.S. Ever considered serialised letters on your "Last Word" page?

Don't tempt me with suggestions like that, Tim — you just might create a monster! — especially since the letters page has been so squeezed for space lately. Actually, my solution to your massive missive was to cut your specific art notes, since many of the matters you brought up have been addressed on this letters page at some length by both Bil Stout and Steve Ringgenberg. — DAK

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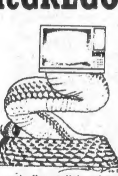

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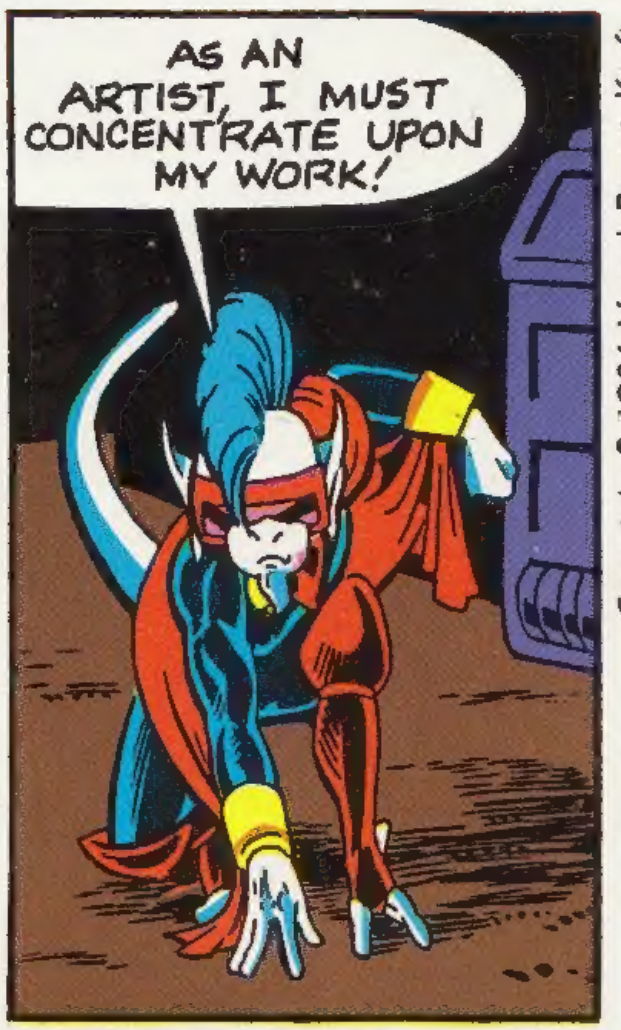

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